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MAY-JUNE 1940

Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

SUNKEN CITIES

by Douglas Newton

THREE LINES of OLD FRENCH

by A. Merritt

THE BLIND SPOT

by Hall and Flint

also other classics

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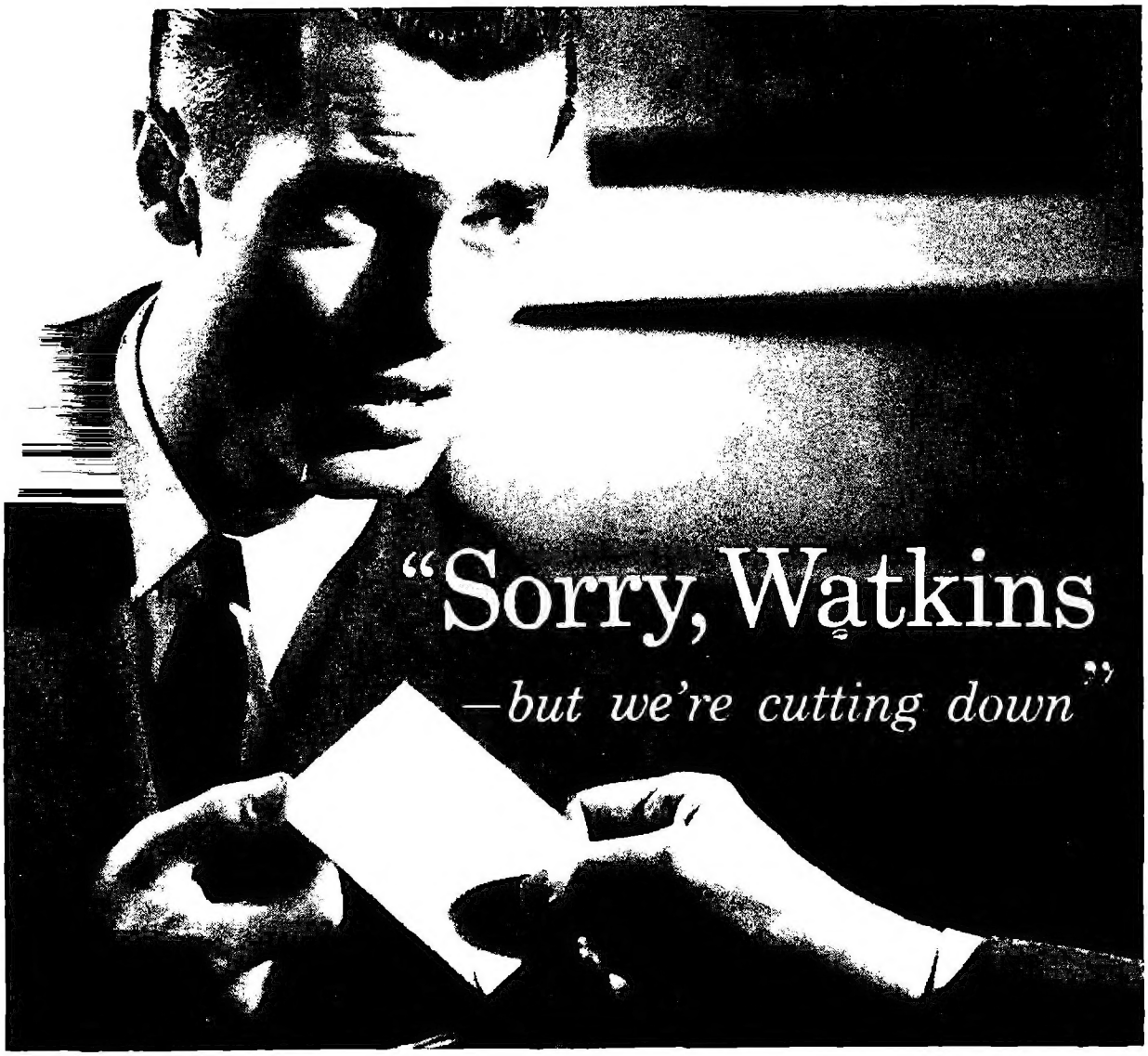

THAT's the explanation they gave him, but they were letting him go for another reason entirely one that Watkins didn't even suspect. Without realizing it, he had offended a number of the firm's best customers and they had complained to the boss. It was sort of tragic to have this happen just when he thought he was getting some place. A good man, Watkins—and an ambitious one—but just a little bit careless.

You can't get away with it

Maybe a few super-employees get away with *halitosis (bad breath), but lesser ones shouldn't even try. This offensive condition, of which anyone may be guilty, is the fault unpardonable in business, and social life Business firms should insist that their employees use Listerine Antiseptic every day, to take precautions against offending.

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NO USE dodging facts!

At times—in every company's history—the pay-roll goes onto the operating table for major surgery.

And when such times come, certain employees are amputated—sometimes a few, sometimes many.

Yet a certain few are always marked "OK-Must Keep!" And the many who are let out envy them—call them "lucky."

What's Behind Job-Holding "Luck"?

It can be *proved*, however, that there's almost always something more than luck involved.

Even the fellow who seems to "have a drag" may actually have a lot more on the ball than is apparent to his fellow workers.

He may have hidden values that only his superiors see or know about.

After all, the "I-Gotta-Drag-Club" has taken a bad licking. In fact, it rather completely disbanded in 1932-1933.

Yet why is it that some employees hold their jobs at the very time when others of seemingly *equal* ability lose theirs?

If it's not luck, there *must* be some explanation.

And there *is* one!

How to Insure Your Job

The secret of holding your job in hard times is to be invaluable to your employer. And a man or woman who *is* invaluable is usually a well-trained one.

Training is of many kinds—stems from many sources. But the LaSalle kind has been unusually successful. Nearly a million members, in a score of subjects, over a thirty year period can testify to that—and many can prove it by their pay envelopes!

They have cause to agree with us that the real secret of both promotion and job security is just this: "On your present job, make sure you are doing it well, then *train* for the job ahead!"

Why It Works

Put yourself at your own president's desk for a moment.

You are faced with cutting the pay-roll. First of all, you certainly are going to do your best to hold on to those employees who really know their present jobs.

But among them—the very last to go will be those few who are also wholly or partly trained for the job ahead—even for the job *ahead* of the job ahead!

What You Should Do About It—

But true as these facts are, you probably will tend to do nothing about them.

"*My* job is safe," you think. "*My* company won't cut down—and even if it does, *I* won't suffer."

But doesn't the very fact that you have read this far indicate that there's some small doubt—a trifle of uneasiness in your mind?

Wouldn't you be more comfortable if right now *your* boss knew that *you* were taking LaSalle training—a piece of knowledge that upon request we take pains to bring to the personal attention of every LaSalle enrollee's superior?

What you *should* do about it is, therefore, as obvious as the coupon below.

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But any worthwhile insurance does cost money. And since this is the nearest thing to job-certainty that we know about—it is *worth* money!

Why not at least investigate? *That* costs not a cent! The coupon will bring a quick response—may help start you on the way toward the future that's *due* you!

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

Vol. II | MAY-JUNE, 1940 | No. 2

Important Announcement!

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will be published

COMPLETE

in the New Magazine

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By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

Also, in this same issue (dated August, on sale June 5) we will publish that other great classic novelet

The Rebel Soul

By AUSTIN HALL

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Whirled by a hurricane into a sea-secret more fantastic than any that explorers from civilization have ever stumbled on

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An immortal fantasy of the First World War

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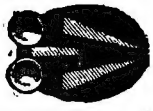

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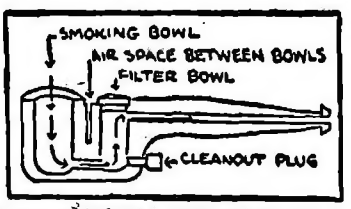

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SUNKEN

By DOUGLAS

A Complete

The strange people in this half-submerged kingdom of the sea were not exactly mermen and mermaids—neither were they just like us

I

THE disaster came suddenly. The sea was quite smooth. The air was thick and hot, and so windless that every sail hung back. All weather conditions were fair. The only indication of anything unusual was the coppery mist that magnified the moon and turned it to orange.

I didn't see the first wave, for I was taking my trick below. Vampage said it was as high as Popocatepetl and traveling at the rate of a thousand miles an hour. Knowing Vampage for the precise scientist he is, one can gauge the moral effect of that wave on him.

Luckily we were practically bow on, and the schooner went up the watery slope of this marine mountain in a dizzy swoop. That was where I woke. Coming out of a dream in which I was climbing a wall like a human fly, I found myself shooting through the air. I landed on what I thought was the floor, but it wasn't, as I found when I discovered my foot through the frame of one of Vampage's Inca drawings, which hung on the forward bulkhead, near the ceiling.

I did find the floor a minute later, for the schooner righted. She also began to jump and pitch like a mad horse. We were

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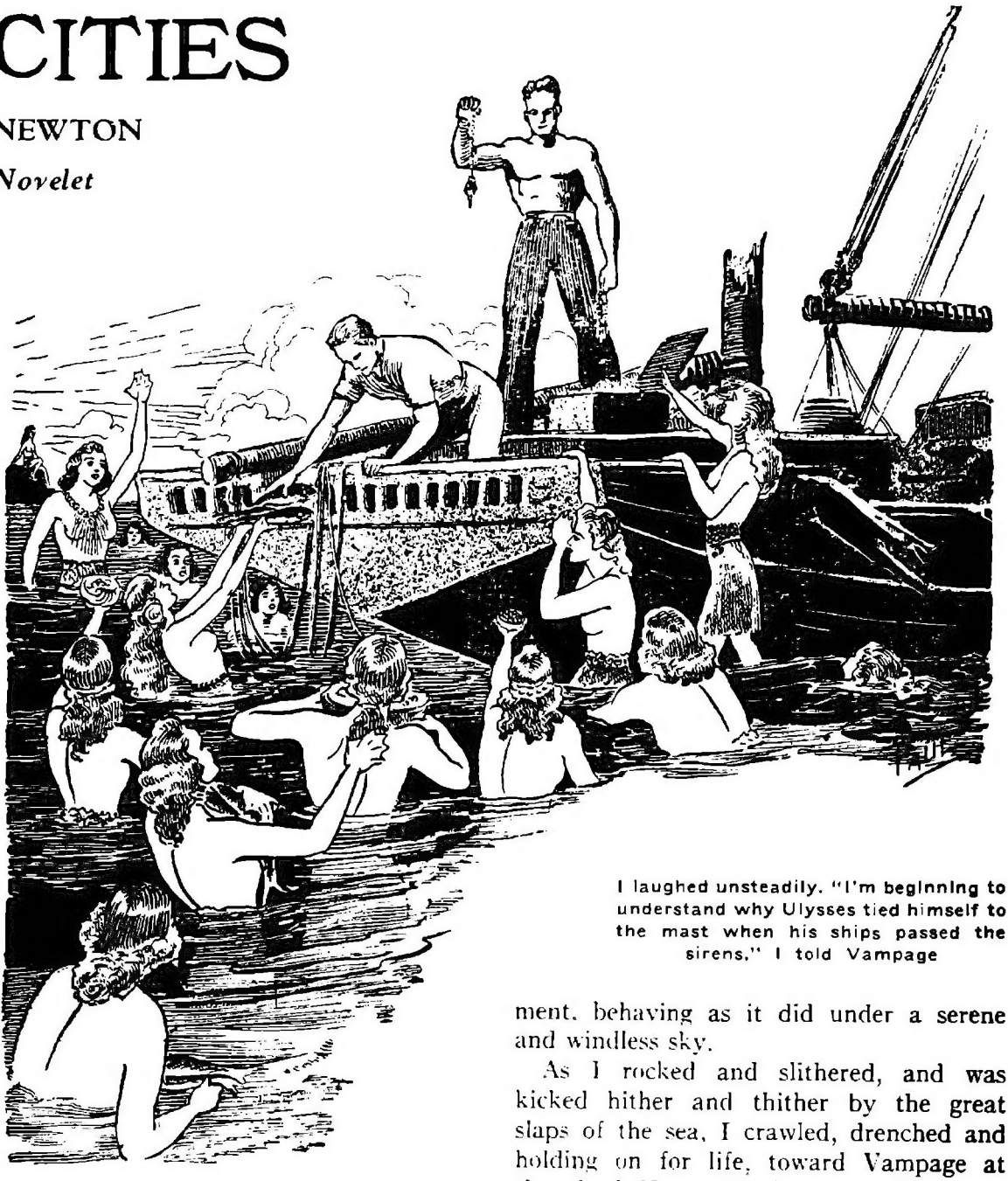
CITIES

NEWTON

Novelet



I laughed unsteadily. "I'm beginning to understand why Ulysses tied himself to the mast when his ships passed the sirens," I told Vampage

in the rough water at the top of the wave, and were getting the worst of it.

On deck I saw the most nerve-destroying sight I have ever looked upon. The sea all about us was lashed to an incredible fury. It whirled and tossed into waves that looked like spouting mountains.

From the look of things we were in the heart of a tornado—only there wasn't any tornado. There was no wind. I think that unnerved me most—that terrible, tearing sea, which threatened to swamp us any moment, behaving as it did under a serene and windless sky.

As I rocked and slithered, and was kicked hither and thither by the great slaps of the sea, I crawled, drenched and holding on for life, toward Vampage at the wheel. He was holding on to that crazy wheel with the concentration of a giant; but he was able to gasp in no great voice, so still was the air:

"Earthquake—submarine upheaval—get sail off her, Warenne—wind presently."

I clawed forward on the wild and bucking deck. I yelled for our three kanakas, but none came, so I let the mainsail down at a run. There wasn't so much risk, as there was no wind.

One of the men, Toao, came up then, and began to stow the big sail. His teeth

were chattering, and he let me know why. The two other men had gone overboard.

Before I could get to the jib, wind hit us. It did the work for me. It blew the canvas right out of its bolt eyes, and for the moment I thought we were finished.

We heeled, and the sea seemed to flow right over us, unopposed. Then we kicked out of it into a night still serene, though I could see massed clouds hurling forward like armies of devils on the charge.

We ought to have been swamped out and drowned a score of times during the next two or three hours, but by a series of miracles we were not. I need not describe what happened to us during that time. Vampage and I clung to the wheel, trying to keep the schooner before the wind, and wondering when the end would come.

About three o'clock in the morning we thought it had. The fury of the waters, now no more distinguishable than pale gleams in the intense darkness, seemed to redouble until the whole world raved insanely. There came a series of crashes, bumps, whirlings, heavings, and poundings. I had the foolish impression that we were turned over and over like a pebble rolling along the floor. To this day I can't say whether that was what happened. I heard Vampage's voice bawling, close to my ear:

"Hit—something—surely?"

I knew instinctively that our mast and most of our rail had gone. I also knew instinctively that no other human being had ever gone through such an experience; and then, quite suddenly, things were almost deadly calm.

Not really deadly calm, for the wind still howled over us—but it *was* over us. We didn't understand it, but we seemed to have been forced into a pocket of a dead calm, a little hole in the storm.

The schooner was on even keel, and so steady that we seemed fixed on something—a sand bank, we thought. This was confirmed by the fact that, though strained and leaking, the water did not gain, but maintained a level that was actually below our water line.

It was too dark to see anything, and we were too much exhausted to care whether we were going to die or not. When we found that the storm no longer touched us, we simply flopped down on the deck and slept.

II

THE hot glare of the sun woke both of us practically at the same time, and we opened our eyes to a world in full daylight. We saw that the reason why the sun hadn't waked us an hour earlier was that it had only just struck down on us from over a high cliff.

I was staring, amazed, at that unexpected high cliff wall, when Vampage cried in a tone of amazement:

"By Jove, it is the Wahine Rock!"

I turned and followed Vampage's eyes to the sky line, and there, sure enough, towered the profile of that lonely and little known ocean mountain top—the Wahine Rock.

I was quite as startled as Vampage. We had been sailing for the Wahine Rock. We wanted to study the megalithic remains there. We had a theory that we could connect up the great stone fortresses and gigantic heads on the isolated and uninhabited Wahine with finds made of ancient civilizations in a certain remote valley of the Andes.

My surprise, however, was not at finding that the curious tempest of the night had carried us safely to the very point we wanted to reach. It was a more astounding thing than that. It was that the Wahine Rock was no longer the Wahine Rock.

The Wahine, as I have indicated, is—or was—no more than the summit of a mountain thrusting itself over sea level, as the St. Paul's Rock in the Atlantic does. It was—I had better keep it to "was"—well outside of the trade routes. It had practically no vegetation, and was the most desolately isolated of all the lonely Pacific islands.

In fact, nobody would dream of visiting it save archaeologists like ourselves,

who were interested in the few but remarkably well preserved ruins on the slopes of the rock. These ruins—forts constructed of huge slabs of stone, houses of the same nature, and colossal statues—have been half covered by the sea, indicating that in some previous age the Wahine Rock must have been of greater extent, and that it has been submerged in some nature disturbance of the sea bed.

And there lay the reason of our astonishment. The Wahine Rock was no longer the Wahine Rock. It was an island of fair size. That which had once been sunk by some great convulsion had emerged from the sea, thanks to the earthquake that had done its best to wreck us.

We were lying in a deep estuary between high cliffs, on one side, and on the other a beach and slopes leading up to the crest which we both knew—since we had visited the place—to be the old top of the Wahine. We could also see weeds and deep water incrustations leading up to the old water line, which was now nearly a mile above us.

The seaward end of our estuary was blocked by a bar of slimy shingle, which every wave submerged. We must have been flung right over that bar by the great waves—luckily, for the bar broke the force of the breakers and left us in smooth water. We could see that the schooner itself rested on a bank of shingle that curved up out of unimaginable depths.

"Jove!" cried Vampage. "There's no doubt about it! That which an earthquake once buried under the sea, an earthquake has restored." He stared up to where the old stone houses and platforms cut the sky. "And, Warenne," he said in a shaking voice, "I believe that that accident is going to give us the greatest find in the annals of archaeology!"

"Meaning exactly?"

"Look!" he whispered, and his fingers sketched the outline of the great prehistoric structures. "They continue under water, as every reputable expert thought. Those few remains on the old Wahine are but the topmost buildings, and there are others down the slope. Look at the massing of them! Why, my boy, there are thousands of buildings—a veritable city!"

HIS excitement had got hold of me now. He was right in saying that there was no doubt about it. Massing all the way up the slope from the beach, greened by sea slime, but, on the whole, curiously free from marine growth, were the buildings of what must have once been a large city.

We could make out, even from that distance, the unmistakable solid bulk of the great block stone houses and platforms, built, it seemed, by giants, who cut their huge stones so cunningly that the walls held firm for ages, though cement was never used. I could see, on great platforms, rows of huge images, some nearly forty feet high, some with the round crowns worn by similar images on Easter Island. The entire mass of houses and platforms and images was built up the mountainside in a way made familiar to us by the Inca remains in Peru and Chile. There was no doubt that a prehistoric city had come to light.

A marvelous find for us! Fragmentary remains of a splendid unknown race, or races, are found all over the Pacific from Easter Island to the Carolines; but they are only fragment, giving mere hints of a departed people whose secret is lost. Here, before our eyes, was a complete city.

"And if it was as suddenly engulfed as it was vomited up again into daylight," Vampage said, "then we ought to find in those houses priceless memoirs of human existence—implements, vessels, ornaments, furniture, perhaps; many traces of a vanished civilization— I say!"

He took a step forward and peered.

"Did you see something, too?" I said breathlessly.

"What do you think you saw?" Vampage asked me.

"It's absurd," I said, shamefaced. "I thought I saw something *walking!*"

He frowned.

"Then I'm absurd, too," he muttered. "That's what I thought I saw."

"Up there by that platform of images?"

"No, down there by that building that looks like a temple."

"Somebody walking?"

"Yes, upright."

We stared at each other. How could anything that walked upright be on that uninhabited rock only just emerged from the depths of the sea?

"No good being fanciful," I said, with a forced laugh. "We're not the only people who could be wrecked here."

"No," he replied. "No, that is an explanation; but—but it was bare skin, I thought."

"And very white skin—very."

"Yes," he said. "Might be natives."

"Might," I said; "only we're well in the belt of the dark Melanesians. I didn't think—it didn't strike me as a human being who'd lost its clothes, either."

"Ah! You boggle at the sex, too!"

"The hair, I thought, was long and—and, well, I couldn't help thinking that the figure was womanly."

"We're letting our nerves trick us," he said decisively. "It could be nothing but survivors from a wreck. If so, we'd better give them a hail."

We both shouted at the top of our lungs. Our voices rang like thunder against the cliff, boomed and echoed up through the massy stone walls of the once sunken city. We paused, breathless, with hammering hearts, and listened.

There arose a most extraordinary sound—a weird sound. It was a frightened, thin wailing. It rose and fell shrilly, musically, as if tangled with its own echoes. It was a queer, pitiable, flutelike, birdlike sound.

"Birds!" said Vampage, in the voice of a man glad to set his fears at rest. "Look!"

A host of birds rose up from one quarter of the island. They flew screaming upward, with a thousand white flashes of wings.

"Gulls, mostly—but there are vultures there!" I cried. "What the deuce are they doing here?"

"Feeding on the dead fish that couldn't escape when the island was heaved up out of the sea," replied Vampage.

"Do vultures feed on fish?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said slowly, completely puzzled; "but obviously they made that sound."

He said that, I know, because he wanted to convince himself; but he failed. I wasn't convinced, either. It might have been a bird noise, of course, only—only there had been something creepily human in that wailing.

"Anyhow, there's been no anwering shout," he went on doggedly. "What is more, I haven't seen any more—walking. Have you?"

"Not a sign. The place seems dead."

"It is dead," he said resolutely. "We've been nerve-shaken fools, Warenne. The flash of a bird wing, or the play of the sunlight, on a flapping weed, has deceived us."

I said nothing. Perhaps it was better to think we had been deceived. All the same, I wasn't.

"Anyhow, we'd better get ashore to look around," Vampage suggested.

"How?" I asked. "Our only boat is smashed, and we haven't enough broken bits to build a raft."

"We'll swim, naturally."

I looked into the deep, black waters of the estuary that yesterday must have been the best part of a mile under the surface.

"Of course we'll swim," I said. "We can't miss looking at that town—only, well, I'm just wondering exactly what sort of sea monsters lurk down there."

"None, I hope," he answered with a shudder. "If there had been any, we should have seen them floating dead on the water. The change from the deep sea to the surface would probably have killed them. At the same time, we can't take risks."

III

WE TOOK as few risks as possible. Leaving Toao to deal with the leaks in the hull of the schooner—surprisingly few, thank goodness—we went ashore. We used a grating lashed to a couple of empty boxes as a sort of raft. Vampage stood on

it with his automatic in his left hand and a boat hook in his right. His business was to watch for the rise of sea monsters. I swam and pushed the raft along. I did this not because I was braver, but because I am a good swimmer.

We had, I suppose, about two hundred and thirty yards to go. We had covered two-thirds of the distance when I heard Vampage gasp. I looked up, and saw him staring over my shoulder into the sea, with the most extraordinary look on his face. It wasn't terror. It was a look of astonishment, bewilderment, and fascination combined. He peered into the water with enthralled eyes, not attempting to defend me against anything.

I stopped kicking, and floated.

"What is it?" I cried.

As I spoke, something touched me. It touched the calf of my leg, and ran over it with a gentle pressure, as if to feel it. It passed to the duck trousers I was wearing, tucked above the knee. It tugged gently at them, as if to appraise their texture. It slid up, fingering my belt, and then my silk shirt.

It was uncanny, that touch, but not alarming. It was as if the small hand of a curious child or girl was trying to discover what I was made of. It was a touch as gentle and as delicate as a caress. I wasn't afraid, but suddenly this thing, this hand, took a firm hold of my shirt and began to tug me downward.

I shouted and kicked. Vampage became galvanized into life. He leaned over and beat on the water with the flat of the boat hook. I noticed that he beat the surface only, striking nowhere near where the thing that held me must be.

The thing left in a flurry. I could feel the water swirl about me as it went rapidly; and I, too, went rapidly pushing Vampage on his platform through the water at the best speed I knew.

Panting on the slimy beach, I stared at Vampage, whose face was a most curious study.

"What was it?" I demanded.

"I wonder if I've gone mad?" he said.

"You've not," I said; "and one way to keep sane is to tell me what it was."

His answer was staggering.

"Do you believe in the mermaid myth, Warenne?" was what he said.

I sat up, dumfounded. Was he mad, after all?

I asked myself that, and somehow I wasn't sure of the answer.

"That was what I saw, or thought I saw," he said more or less incoherently. "A girl rising through the water—hair floating out like a dark cloud—white shoulders—very white breasts—white arms touching you—hands—"

"A fish tail?" I cried, half scoffing, half serious.

"Legs," he said. "I saw calves, and small feet, very slender, very white. Oh, you're laughing at me, Warenne; and perhaps you're right.

"Perhaps I am mad; only that's what I thought I saw."

"That's what I thought I felt," I said soberly enough.

I explained my sensations of something plucking at me like a human hand.

No, we couldn't answer the riddle then and there; yet somehow, though the thing was impossible, we had to take it seriously. Vampage had seen. I had felt.

"There was something queer about the neck and throat," said Vampage, elaborating his vague description; "something that looked like fish gills. The flesh seemed curiously transparent, with a beautiful pearly transparency. I thought I saw others, too, in the depths, hovering, as if not so daring as this—this girl. There were pale, pointed faces and dark eyes looking up. White, dim shapes and clouds of hair floating."

We turned it over and over, getting no farther.

"We can't answer that problem by sitting down over it. We may by exploring. Come on!" I said, at last.

I put on thick boots and buckled on the pistol and the big cutting knife that had been carried on the raft, and we made our way up to the city.

THE first group of houses we came to told us that we had made a find indeed. They were the authentic dwellings of an ancient and extinct civilization. It was, however, impossible to examine or enter them. They were choked with sea undergrowth, shell and coral incrustations, and the like. We might have been discouraged, had it not been evident that higher up the mountainside the structures were freer.

We went up through a whole belt of the ancient buildings. Then we came to a break, and crossed what must have been, at one time, a sea beach. Above this we went through another belt of houses and platforms, which was less overgrown than the first. The entrances of the houses were still choked, but the seaweeds and corals were more recent, and not so thick.

Out of this belt, again, we mounted what must have been not so much a beach but a harbor basin. The vast mortised walls that edged it had obviously been quays and dockside structures. Indeed, Vampage pointed to some short upright pillars, which might have been used as bollards for the tying up of ships, or of the great war canoes of the past.

Again we were in a belt of houses partly choked with the weeds and accumulations of years under the sea, but again definitely clearer and less deeply grown. Again we walked through this to what must have once been a beach, fronting a fourth group of houses. It was when we came to this that Vampage stopped and cried out:

"I have it! Do you see what happened, Warenne? This island was swallowed gradually. There were four definite subsidences. Why, it is written as plainly as if it were set down in words. Look there! They built on that cliff across the estuary, too."

"The lowest city, naturally, was the first to go under water, when something happened in the vast subterranean unknown, and the earth crust holding up this portion of the globe settled down. How many centuries ago that happened, Heaven alone knows. It might have been thousands of years before the first kings of ancient Egypt were ruling. The people of that lower town who escaped, or who had fled to the upper heights at the first rumble of the earthquake, built the next town against the next beach, just above the new water level.

"How long that new city, that new race, that new civilization lasted we can't say, but in time that, too, was swallowed, as the mountain on which it was built settled once more. Again the survivors built a new city, which stood for centuries, perhaps; but again the mountain sank deeper, and again the city was drowned. Then they built this last city, which is before us, Warenne—their final holding place. They lived there—how long? Then, and not many hundred years ago, from the look of it, their island sank again. All was buried under the sea, save the few ruins on the mountain top that we knew as the Wahine Rock; and with that final submergence the people and their civilization vanished utterly."

"Are you sure?" I asked.

He looked sharply at me.

"Perhaps their civilization has left its history to be read by us, Warenne," he said.

"I was thinking," said I, "of the people themselves."

He gasped a little, and shuddered.

"Better not," he said. "That way madness lies."

I knew what he meant by that. He meant we must ignore the things we thought we had seen—and felt.

IV

WE turned and entered the last city of the drowned civilization. From what was obviously a harbor basin, set with marvelous quays built of great stone blocks, we mounted, by magnificent broad steps, to the town.

The quays were splendidly spacious, with floors that must once have been as true as a ballroom. The bollards were un-

mistakable now, and Vampage pointed out ringbolts let into the stone surface. He hacked at one with his knife until barnacles, slime, and metal came away.

"Looks like a bronze alloy," he said. "Very like that Inca stuff we found among those hidden people."

I thrilled. We had spent eight months in a remote valley of the Andes, among a people never discovered since the days of the Spaniards. We had seen buildings, ideographic script, implements, weapons, religious and social ceremonies. We had studied a language which seemed to us to give the key to the secret of an ancient civilization that must have spread all over the Pacific from Peru to the Java Sea—and even beyond, through Africa and India, back to the civilizations of the Mediterranean, perhaps.

Then we had sailed out to find other remains that could be co-ordinated with our discoveries; and here, by mighty accident, we had perhaps stumbled on the archaeological treasure house that would tell us everything. Although I am not going into details, they being scientific and dry, I will say that at every step we seemed to see things that confirmed our theory.

The quay was guarded by a gigantic inner wall. We passed through it, under a heavy pylon gate of the type that seems to link the monuments of ancient Egypt with those of prehistoric Mexico and Peru. We walked along high-walled, windowless streets of massive stone houses—streets that might equally well have been those of Cuzo or Thebes in very early times.

We went into a small temple tomb, and saw a seated effigy that might have been an ancient Inca or a Ptolemy. The walls were covered with incised picture writing, and there were little guardian gods about, some with bird or animal heads. The writing, I will admit, showed distinct traces of the Melanesian bird cult, but the wall backing of the statue was Inca—a great metal sun, of solid gold, as the point of Vampage's knife showed. A wonderful find—the key to an age-old mystery!

In the houses, we discovered no furniture, but many trinkets and vessels, vases in human shape or animal form, the little statuettes of fused mercury and gold that only the Incas had the secret of working, and writings in ideographic script. I cannot go into the details here.

What soon impressed itself on us most deeply, however, was not a matter of archaeology. Even on the quay we had noticed it. In the little temple itself, Vampage spoke of it.

"The place is much too clean!" he cried.

"I've been waiting for you to say that," I replied. "It has been worrying me. There's no marine growth at all—no seaweed, very few barnacles, no coral at all. Apart from this slight green slime, the place is well preserved."

"Too well preserved," said Vampage. "It's been under the sea for many years, to human knowledge. It may have been submerged for centuries. It ought to have a growth over it as thick as on the bottom of a lagoon; whereas—"

"Whereas," I said slowly and evenly, "it looks as if it had been carefully swept, weeded, and scoured—carefully tended."

"Carefully tended, at the bottom of the sea! My dear fellow, don't be a madman! Who could have—"

He stopped, gasped, stared at me. He knew what I meant.

"We mustn't think of it," he groaned. "Come on—we'll explore."

BUT we didn't really explore. When we reached what must have been the great central square of the city, all thought of exploration was swept away.

As we stepped into this vast place, amid cyclopean walls, the birds rose up. A host, ten thousand screaming birds, filled the air. They were gulls, mostly, but there were several vultures. The vultures worried me a little.

"Dead fish," said Vampage in a voice which he tried to keep steady. "See them all round by the wall? This square acted like a great trawl as the island lifted out of the sea. No way of getting out save through those four gates, and the rush of

the escaping water drove the fish against the stonework and killed them. The gulls are having the catch of their existence!"

"The vultures," I said shakily, "rose from that corner over there."

Vampage threw a quick look at me, and went pale. Perhaps I did, too. We both felt that we were on the verge of abnormal discoveries. Nevertheless, we went straight across the square to the corner that I had indicated.

And there we saw the people.

There were four of them—two men, a boy, and a young girl. They were all dead. They, too, had been flung against the stonework by the force of the departing water and killed. I heard Vampage's breath coming quickly as we looked down at those pitiable figures, and I knew he was recognizing the creatures he had seen under the water when that shy, curious hand had touched me.

They were slender people, as nude as any savages; but we knew that that was not so because they were savages, but because their habitual element demanded freedom from clothing. The only vestige of garment, if one could call it such, was a belt. On one man and the boy, it was a thing of twisted seaweed. The other man had a belt of metal strips and links, beautifully enameled. We had seen the brother of that belt among the Andean valleys.

The woman's belt was more what one would expect of her sex. From it, after the fashion of a short kilt, were suspended brightly colored streamers of seaweed.

The use of the belts—even the boy's and the woman's was obvious—for each carried a short, daggerlike sword. One of these was of obsidian; two were of some sort of flinty coral. The man with the metal belt carried a weapon of metal alloy. All the weapons were constructed for stabbing. Under water, of course, a cutting stroke is almost impossible.

The bodies before us were short and fine-limbed, but their chests were abnormally large, with the breadth one finds among mountain people and others who have to make the most of an inadequate atmosphere. All four had good features. We recognized them as the features of that hidden race among whom we had lived in the Andes. The nose was high-bridged, the forehead broad, the cheek structure slightly Asiatic.

On the other hand, the mouth was curiously copious and loose, as if accustomed to folding tightly, to shut out some dangerous element. The nostrils, distended now, had a strange rubbery look, as if built to contract to nothing as well as to expand at will. The eyes, slightly protuberant, though not unattractive, had the curious look that one ascribes to a fish.

The skin was very white, indeed—blanched, in fact; yet for all that it had a transparency which, in the girl, reached a lovely pearly luster. The girl, indeed, was quite beautiful. Small-boned and slender, with a luxuriant head of hair, she had the appearance of those delicate and exquisite elfin women drawn by Arthur Rackham, the English artist.

Undeniably these were human beings, and yet—

Vampage bent to the nearest male, and spread out the man's toes, which were very long. The webbing between them was as pronounced as a sea bird's. So, too, was the webbing between the fingers. Some South Sea tribes, which live half their days in the water, have this webbing—grown through the course of generations of habit—but none have it in so marked a degree as these people.

And there was another thing. Vampage pointed to the man's throat. I saw the strange structure which he had declared the mermaid had had in her throat—gills—the gills of a fish.

Undeniably these were human beings, but human beings modified, through the course of centuries, to live in an alien element—to live in the water, like fishes.

We didn't speak as we stared down at those mermen. We didn't dare. A thousand questions and demands for explanation thronged our minds, but we dare not voice them, for wonder, horror, and distress held us.

"These are not myths," said Vampage, in a hollow voice. "They died only a few hours ago in that terrible upheaval."

"That means they were living in this city—living as citizens in a submarine world. By Jove, that is the reason why these buildings are so well kept, why they are free from weed-growths, and are scoured!"

"It's madness!" cried Vampage. "We daren't think of it. It's against nature!"

"The mermaids you saw coming from the depths to me are still living as these peope lived yesterday," I persisted.

"Madness!" groaned Vampage. "Here, let's get on and see if we can find the answer to the riddle before our brains crack!"

V

WE WENT on to the summit, and to those gigantic remains which were once the only things that stood above the sea level. We saw now that this last and highest group of ruins was part of the outskirts of the city we were in.

One huge structure we had particularly desired to examine. We had meant to cut or blast away some of the great stones, for on our previous visit we had seen that it was impossible to get into it from the land side. We quickened our steps to it, for we now perceived that the falling away of the sea revealed great doors leading into it from the vast platform on which it stood.

As we went forward, Vampage stopped. He pointed to a curiously worn hollow in the rock where the old water line had been.

"What do you make of that, Warenne?"

"So you've noticed those places, too!" I said. "I've already decided what they are. Did you observe that two of them had roughly hacked steps? Yes? Well, then, I guess you'll agree with me that those hollows are landing places. The people climbed upon dry land there. From the look of it, they did so regularly and often."

"Yes," he said. "Undoubtedly that is what it means; and yet we saw no signs of such people when we were here last, and I've never met anybody who did."

"No," I said. "They hid, of course; but the fact seems obvious that they did —perhaps had to—come out on dry land at times."

"Like seals," said Vampage.

"Like seals, only they have those gills, and can stay under water longer than seals."

By this time we had reached the great platform. We entered one of the big doors in the vast stone structure, more than half of which had stood above the sea on our previous visit. We had brought torches for just this type of exploration, but we needed them less than we anticipated.

Climbing a smooth ramp, we came out on a wide floor that must have shelved out of the sea until it was above the water level. From a hundred natural or cunningly contrived crevices in the massive walls and the roof towering above us, the sun shot down intensely golden beams. The place was swimming with a soft, gold-dusty light.

At first we were confused by the dusk. As our eyes became accustomed to it, our wonder overwhelmed us. Vampage put the reason of it into words.

"Good Heavens!" he muttered. "It's like one of the great community huts of the South Seas. Look at those divisions, and the things hanging in them—women's skirts of colored seaweed—images, utensils. There's a rack of those swords hanging up. Over there is undoubtedly a couch of seaweed. By Jove, this was the community house. They came in here for the night—couldn't sleep under water, I suppose. The sea is only half their home, and this was used for the other half of life."

"Not was," I said softly. "It is. They are in here now. Can't you feel them? Can't you hear them?"

The feeling of many presences was unmistakable. I had the sense of scores of eyes looking at me from the gloom. These

sea people were gathered in the darkness, watching us.

Vampage felt it, too, I could see. Both of us heard it—the rustlings, the queer, sibilant noises. Our eyes turned instinctively to a dark bay in the vast building. Vampage's arm shot out, and he flashed the light of his powerful torch into the gloom.

The immediate result was flurry and panic. We heard the scared bird wailings that had startled us back on the schooner. We heard scufflings and the rush of bodies. We saw white forms scuttling across and out of the bright rays of the torch. Yes, the sea people were there and alive—and humanly frightened!

Vampage called in a level voice to reassure them, and made a step forward. Immediately one of the stone knives came flying through the air—very badly thrown, but its intent obvious. Vampage switched off his torch, and we retreated toward the nearest door.

"Better get out of this!" he said. "We've disturbed and frightened them. They may attack us, and we don't want to shoot them. Better get out, and let them get used to us and our good intentions gradually."

We backed out, down the ramp, to the platform outside in the sunlight; and there the accident happened.

Twenty of these strange amphibians had run out of the community house and upon the platform. In the sunlight, their courage had come back. Most of them being women and girls, their curiosity had got the better of them. They stood, a delicate, lovely, and fairylike group, looking anxiously and eagerly at the doorway through which they expected us to emerge. They stood, beautifully poised in their slender grace, ready to run, yet eager to see.

They did not realize that we had come out of another door until we were very close to them. Then their panic was profound. They turned and scuttled like so many startled pixies across the great platform. I have never seen a more beautiful sight, as their slender limbs twinkled, and their pearly skins shone in the sun, while their long hair floated behind them, shining like lovely sea wrack.

Then, with a shrill cry, one frail girl stumbled over an unevenness in the platform, staggered, and fell. She lay still, stunned, and the rest vanished.

WE RAN up to the poor, delicate thing. In my arms she seemed indeed as unsubstantial as a fairy. I never saw so delicate, so pointed and piquant, a little face. The beauty of it thrilled me. She had suffered a heavy blow on the temple, and lay cold in my arms.

I forced just a drop or two from my brandy flask between her teeth—sharp, pointed little teeth. Her soft little shoulders shuddered, and she opened her eyes. She looked into my eyes for a minute, and then shrank away from me in fear, fighting to escape.

I smiled at her and let her go. I said over and over again the ancient word, the token of friendship, which we had learned in the mountains of Peru.

She seemed to understand either my word or my smile. She hesitated; then panic came over her again. She wriggled upright from my knee and tried to run.

I let her have her own way absolutely, making no effort to hold her; but she was too dizzy to go far, and there was a gash on her shin that must be paining her. After three strides she sank down again, hiding her face in her arms.

We did nothing at all, but simply left her alone. In a minute her shoulders stopped shuddering. She even stole a look at us. We sat squatting, smiling at her.

In another half minute she turned her full face to us. Though she was trembling, both curiosity and reassurance were getting the better of her. Crouching, supporting herself by one slender arm, she faced us while she examined us steadily. I uttered the word of friendship again, and held up bare hands—the simplest gesture of peaceful intentions.

She sat up. She was conquering herself,

or her curiosity was. She gave a half smile —a lovely, pixy smile. Then she grew afraid again, and dragged her stone stabbing sword from her girdle.

We smiled again. We lifted our own big cutting knives, and carefully put them down on the platform, away from us.

Then she really did smile. With a delicious little gesture she put her weapon away, and allowed us to approach.

We made motions to show that we wanted to attend to her injured leg, and I took out the first-aid packet we always carried. After some hesitation, she stretched out the leg, and I took it into my hand.

She watched, frightened but interested, while I gently washed the wound with water from my bottle. She giggled when I dusted boracic powder upon the cut. She was in raptures when I put a patch of gold-beater's skin over the wound, and bound the slender, delicate limb with an anklet of soft lint. It was a new trinket for her.

Her courage had come back completely. Her elfin smile came perpetually. Her thin, fine fingers played over my hands, pinching them gently, to see if they were real flesh.

My clothes amazed her. Tugging at my shirt, and finding it wasn't tight skin, she gave bird laughs of wonder. The bright, slightly futuristic silk handkerchief in the breast pocket of my shirt filled her with amazement. When I gave it to her she was in a transport of delight. She suddenly flung her arm around my neck, with the abandoned gesture of a child, and gave me a little hug. Then, springing to her feet, she turned and waved the handkerchief, like a flag, at the others.

There must have been two score of the sea people on the platform by this time, half of them men. The women kept at a timid distance, and hid as much as possible. The men stood a good way off, with their queer swords in their hands, hesitating between flight and attack. The gestures of the girl we had succored reassured them, but still they would not come near.

The girl limped toward them, calling to them as she went. This was our first proof that they had a spoken language. She used distinct words, and though we did not understand, we felt that some of them, at least, had root sounds very like the language we had studied among the hidden people of the Andes.

Still the others would not come forward, and the girl, smiling at us, looked back and forward, at a loss. We merely smiled and waved our hands to her, and left her to her companions.

It was no good hurrying things, we knew. We must allow the girl to tell the others that we were friendly and harmless, and leave them alone ourselves until they had become accustomed to the idea of us.

We thought we had plenty of time in front of us—months, probably, of the most wonderful study and discovery.

VI

ONE happening, at least, on the way down to the schooner warned us that we might be wrong.

We were on the beach between the second and third of the once submerged cities, when the world began to tremble under our feet. It was a sharp and horrible sensation. The motion threw us flat. We heard the birdlike screaming of the amphibians, around us, and knew that they, too, were terror-stricken. And no wonder. For the space of a minute and a half the very earth swayed and rocked, buckled and heaved—and then was quite still again.

"Another shock!" said Vampage, as we climbed to our feet. "I don't think we are finished with these earthquakes yet. It seems to me that before we start thinking about studying these ruins, we'd better satisfy ourselves that the schooner is still seaworthy."

"You don't mean you think the island may sink under the sea again, Vampage?"

"I hope not, for the discoveries we are to make. But it did so before, and may

do it again; and it would be wise for us to make sure that we ourselves possess something capable of floating."

That was the first untoward thing that happened to us as we hurried down to the sea. The second was physically still more fearsome, though perhaps less momentous.

We had gained the lowest of the belts of houses—the city that must have been submerged to a depth of nearly a mile before the earthquake heaved the island above the sea again. Making our way through a wilderness of branching coral and massed and decaying marine growths, we saw something stir in a pool of water and slime. We stopped and looked, and a monster crab rose and attacked us.

The mere sight of him made me sick with horror. He was a loathsome brute. His legs were tall and spidery, like stilts, and they lifted him at least four feet from the ground. His blotched white body was enormous. His big fixed eyes stared straight into mine with cold voracity.

He came with a jump and a sharp, scuttling run that was groggy, but full of the beastliest intention. His enormous nippers poked out at me, and the froth of hungry desire bubbled out of his mouth. I was helpless with a nauseating fright.

Vampage killed the brute with a single upward stroke of his big cutting knife. The knife, in fact, went clean through its body, with such force that it fell apart.

"A deep sea crab," said Vampage, as we examined the monster. "No armor, and as soft as pulp. It was probably dying, from the change from deep sea pressure to air. He'd be an ugly customer in his own element, though."

"Yes," I said, "and it seems to me that there may be other and still uglier creatures flung up by that earthquake. We'd be wise to have the rifle with the exploding bullets ready for action."

VII

WHEN we reached the seashore, we found that, slight though the earthquake tremor had been, it had wrought astonishing changes. The first knowledge of this came from the fact that a strong sea was pounding and swirling up the estuary, which told us that the shingle bar that had protected it had sunk. It was evident that in that tremor the island must have subsided at least five feet.

We were naturally anxious for the schooner, but we soon found that Toao had been quite adequate to meet the situation. Floated off the shingle bed by the dropping of the land, he had allowed the drive of the incoming sea to carry him up the inlet, where, choosing his moment, he had made the impetus carry him around a long range of old buildings stretching out into the estuary like a breakwater. He had been carried right across the smooth water here, and had grounded the schooner on a smooth, sandy flat.

He was up to his waist in water, when we arrived, examining the hull of the schooner for leaks. He had already cut away the tangle of ropes that bound the broken mast to the vessel.

He was a very calm Polynesian, Toao, and he told us that with a very little patching the schooner would be quite seaworthy. And in fact we found this out while we worked on the hull, as we did nearly all that afternoon.

Toao was quite undisturbed by fear of earthquakes or death, but the sight of the amphibians filled him with superstitious terror. He told us that they had been swimming about the ship ever since we left it. They had climbed out on the rocks or floated, face and shoulders showing, as if they sought to allure him. He had been so much afraid that he had been on the point of barricading himself in a cabin, when the earthquake tremor had frightened all of them away.

"Why were you afraid of them?" we asked.

"But of course, lords," he answered. "Did they not want to drag me down to death? That is what they always do."

"You know all about these people, then?" said I.

"Certainly! This is the place whence

come the Women of the Beaches. That is why it is called the Wahine Rock—the Woman's Rock. All through the islands they are known. Have you not heard the story? There are certain bays with lovely beaches, which these women haunt."

"They can't haunt," said Vampage, grinning. "They're human—flesh and blood. Only spirits can haunt."

"Whatever they are," insisted Toao, not at all shaken, "they are not as people of this world. They haunt these beaches, waiting for men. If men go upon the beaches, then they show themselves, and, because they are beautiful the men love them; they are dragged under the waters and are gone forever."

"We know that fairy tale," I said smiling; "but I don't think it has anything to do with the people here."

"This is called the Wahine Rock for no other reason," declared Toao. "They have been seen here by men of our race."

So these amphibians had been seen on the Wahine before, by natives! All the same, we were not at all inclined to think that these people had anything to do with the familiar South Sea legend of the Women of the Beaches.

"There are men among the people here, too, Toao," Vampage told him.

"Of course," he admitted. "They are those they have pulled under the sea."

"But they are all white," I argued, "not dark, like the people of the islands, and they have high bones in their noses, like ours."

"It is the sea that changes them," said Toao, unconsciously quoting Shakespeare.

Toao held to his definite opinion, but we could not agree with him. Why should we? His theory was fantastic, while we knew that we were facing decisive facts.

Here before us, in these four submerged cities, was evidence of a civilization going back for very many centuries—perhaps for uncountable centuries. The people we had seen showed the strain not of the Polynesian or even of the older negroid type, but a rarer, white race. They were, in fact, akin to the very high type that we had found in the hidden Andean valleys, and we were convinced that they were the remnant of a tremendous and highly cultured people who had dominated the greater portion of the two Americas, and probably the whole Pacific belt also.

"I'M THRILLED, Warenne," said Vampage. "I really do believe we are on the verge of the greatest historical discovery of the age. I feel that if not from these amphibian people themselves, then certainly from their ruins, we shall solve the riddle that has so greatly puzzled every archaeologist who has studied the question of extinct American civilizations."

"I confess," I smiled, "I am thinking, at present, more of the people themselves."

"*She* was certainly a very lovely little thing," he answered slyly.

"Very lovely," I said blushing; "and because she is so lovely, she helps me to concentrate on the human and personal side of the matter. Why is she amphibian? What condition of things forced her and her kind into a physical shape in which she can, and perhaps must of necessity, live in two elements—water as well as air?"

"Perhaps you have answered that yourself, Warenne," he said. "Necessity did it. I've been thinking on those lines this afternoon, and I believe it is the only answer. Besides, everything conspires to that end. Take, first, the four submerged cities. The four—or there may even have been more—separate catastrophes that gradually drowned what may have been a thickly populated island kingdom, must have assured the people of their ultimate doom. The disasters probably happened at long intervals—indeed, they must have done so; but nevertheless, the race that was gradually forced up the mountainside by successive submergences must have seen that there would come a day when the island would be completely, or almost completely, engulfed. They were a cultured, a brilliant, and perhaps, in their way, a scientific race. Let us agree that

their history taught them what, logically, would be the end of their island home. They knew, that is, that a final earthquake would sink their kingdom—or most of it—under the sea. They prepared themselves to survive such an end."

"The best preparation, Vampage, would be to take ship and search out a more stable island or mainland," I jeered.

"*We* think so," he said. "Did they? I think not. Indeed, facts prove not. They did not take ship and go away, for they are still here. Possibly they had arrived at the conclusion that the whole world was to disappear under the seas. The subsidence of other islands, maybe, made them feel that. We can see for ourselves that they must have prepared themselves to survive in a world that was merely water, and apparently they succeeded."

"But, my dear Vampage!" I cried. "Do you mean to tell me you think that ordinary, normal people deliberately trained themselves to be half fish, half human?"

"Deliberately, or by force of circumstances, they have become half fish, half men, haven't they?"

"But you're talking about a physical impossibility!"

"Am I? Surely not. Don't we know half a dozen tribes between here and the Australian coast which, from constant swimming and traffic with the sea, have developed a definite webbing on their feet and hands? These people only carry that webbing a stage further."

"That doesn't explain their gills. We don't know any tribe with gills like fishes, do we?"

"We do know, though, that quite a number of children are born with gills, Warenne. Indeed, it's not so very strange, for it is an established fact that the rudimentary organs of the fish exist in all of us. Is it inconceivable, then, that constant training to live an underwater life might have redeveloped those gills which all men have? It may have come about through the evolution of centuries."

"They may always have been like that," I said.

"That is a theory quite as fantastic as mine, Warenne," he returned; "and I don't think it holds good. Did you observe those great carven images? Did you notice the image we saw in the temple?"

"Not closely," I admitted.

"If you had, you might not have used that argument. Not a single statue showed signs of gills, rudimentary or otherwise. The gods of their system, then, handed down, as they were, from past ages, were like other dwellers on the earth. They had no gills. Why? Because the men who first carved these gods hadn't gills, and reproduced the human form as they saw it."

I was silent. The argument seemed final.

VIII

WE WERE at dinner, and we sat in the growing dusk, thinking of the strange life of these amphibians on the island. We sat there until the sun was almost down.

Suddenly we were aroused by an outcry from Toao, on the deck. We rushed up, only just evading the Polynesian's charge as he ran to cover. On deck we realized why he had bolted. The ship was surrounded by women—the siren women, Toao thought.

It was really a wonderful and beautiful sight—and amazingly fantastic, too, if you like. The schooner, now properly calked, lay out about a cable from land; and all around us were the women—scores of them, old and young, mature and as slender and girlish as dryads.

They paddled gently, keeping themselves perfectly upright, their milk-white shoulders and breasts and their pearly arms lying on the shining water. About them and behind, their hair floated gloriously, weedlike but magical. Their pointed, elfin faces were turned to us, and their eyes looked shadowy and shining.

They were laughing at us with little bird sounds, raising slender, lovely, eerie arms that seemed to draw us!

"By Jove!" I said with a beating heart, looking on that ring of delicate and un-

canny loveliness. "It does look as if Toao was right. They seem like siren women enticing us into the deep!"

Vampage's voice came unnaturally cold —I suppose he saw the effect on me.

"Don't be an ass, Warenne. They've merely come to pay their respects and express their gratitude. See their votive offerings."

I saw that they had brought us presents. Along the side of the ship lay an amazing array. There were brilliantly scaled fish—veritable rainbows—in soft nests of wondrous seaweeds. There were shining pearly shells, branches of prismatic coral, strange stones that glittered, fine woven fish nets of seaweed, eating fish in piles, shells that were like horns, a score of wonders. They had brought their best offerings to us, the things that seemed to them the crown of beauty and utility.

"I believe they think we're gods!" I cried in an excited voice, drinking in the smiles of the women all around.

"Let 'em," said Vampage harshly, "as long as they don't find out we're far too human."

I laughed jeeringly, but I knew he was right. There was something about these fragile things that seemed to intoxicate me with a dangerous fairy allure.

One swam close, calling to *me* in her birdlike voice; and she was most delicate and beautiful. I leaned towards her. Vampage put his hand on my arm.

"It's all right," I said. "It's the little girl we helped this morning. Isn't she a dear? I say, isn't it etiquette to return presents? We'd better open up one of those cases of trinkets we brought for trade."

"I think *you'd* better do it," said Vampage grimly.

"Perhaps you're right," I laughed unsteadily. "I'm beginning to understand why Ulysses tied himself to the mast when he was in the neighborhood of ladies like these."

When I came back with the trade goods, Vampage, scientific old stick that he was, was squatting as near to the water as he could, with three women floating quite close. He was patiently trying them out with simple, primary words of the dialect we had learned up in the valleys of the Andes.

"I believe we're right, Warenne!" he cried with excitement.

Fancy being excited about a dialect when three lovely faces, with lovely shoulders to match, were floating a foot away! "I'm sure these are the same people. Their inflection is shriller, stressed differently, and there are deviations in accent and meaning, but there is undoubtedly a common root. Listen!"

But there was to be no listening. The exquisite sea creatures had caught sight of the articles I carried in my hands, and they raised such a twittering and bird calling, such a laughing and cooing that the solemn subject of language roots was swept right away. Even Vampage had to join in distributing bead necklaces and armlets, bits of brightly colored cloth, and the two dozen other gaudy things of our line of trade.

The moon was up before we were through with it all and all the women had swum off, twittering, with their loot—that is, all save one. She remained looking up at me, slender, exquisite, lovely, her little hand grasping a broken bit of rail, her body half out of the water, so that she could see me the better. She was the girl I had aided.

I stood looking down at the sheer white beauty of her as the moon shone down over her. Pointed face, lovely and alluring; hair as dark as night, making a tent over the pearl of shoulders and breast; dark, mysterious eyes shining out of shadows up to mine. I was thrilled, intoxicated. I couldn't tear myself away.

She put up a hand, and I caught it. It was cold, but soft and thrilling. It pressed mine, it pulled gently, gently. My blood pounded, and I half yielded, moving toward the side of the schooner.

Vampage's hand caught me tight at the elbow, and his voice said harshly:

"Don't be a fool! *You haven't gills.*"

I came to myself. I bent down, kissed the tiny hand, laughed and waved adieu. Then I went pointedly down below.

I CAME up again presently, and sat quietly in the night.

Yes, they went ashore to sleep. I saw white forms moving in the moonlight, white forms stretched out in sleep. I saw on a near-by rock, sitting like an exquisite statue, watching me, a white form. I thought I heard singing, gentle, soft, bird-like singing that might be wind in the rigging. Singing that seemed to have a call; a deep sea call.

I wondered if here was the secret of all the legends of the sirens. Was this, perhaps, the remnant of a race that existed and was known in the days when myth was made? Did the ancients know them to be sirens, and real? Was there a truer explanation of their existence than Vampage's theory?

They called—they seemed to pull at my heartstrings, bidding me plunge into the sea to get to them. Their beauty, their singing bird notes, seemed to overpower my will. I stood up.

Vampage heard me. He came up solidly, told me that it was impossible to sleep below, and sat lolling against the stump of the mast. He dissipated all myth and mystery with his powerful presence, and with his even more powerful tobacco.

IX

THERE were other things to disturb us that night. We had another earthquake shock. It was short and sharp. There were amazing crashings and bangings—the noises of earth, splitting and heaving. We seemed to be lifted up and dropped a terrific distance, then whirled hither and thither.

For half an hour we were in utter chaos, and I felt that our last hour had come. Then, quite amazingly, we settled, gently rocking, on the bosom of a calm sea. It was amazing, because with the shock, a storm had developed again, and we could hear an ocean inferno raging elsewhere; but we were untroubled. We rode calmly, not even feeling the wind greatly

We saw why when we awoke the next morning. The earthquake had done terrible things to the Wahine Rock. The great cliff which I described previously as being between us and the open sea had either crumbled away or been engulfed again. Only a low, rocky, splintered surface lifted between us and the angry ocean. It more than kept the breakers from us—it had locked us in. Part of it had fallen across the mouth of the estuary, and we were now on a lake completely landlocked.

That meant a great danger for us, I'll admit, but we spent less time in considering it, just then, than in examining the effects of the shock on the Wahine Rock. It was ghastly to look at that. Nearly half of the island had been swallowed once more by the sea, two of the cities had vanished again, and the water was covering most of the houses of the third. Of the amphibians themselves we saw not a sign. They had either taken shelter higher up the mountain, or gone under water, where they would be safe from the storm.

Our own desires, as a matter of fact, made demands on us. We saw that if we were not lucky, the greatest historical find of the age would be snatched from us. Any time now there might come another shock that would drown the last city, with its marvelously scoured and preserved remains. That was the idea which obsessed us, even to the exclusion of our own danger and the fate of the strange amphibian people.

We went below to eat a hasty breakfast, ordering Toao to do his best to move the schooner in toward the now distant mountain slope. When we came on deck, we were close in against the colossal walls of the third town, with the waves of our lake beating gently against them. I was standing by to cast a rope to the housetops at the water's edge, and Vampage was taking the tiller, when something happened.

First, like a flight of flying fish, there came shooting right out of the depths a

score of white forms. They came leaping and darting to the surface; they wheeled and flashed and scattered like fish fleeing from some cannibal enemy. It was a moment before we realized that we were watching the amphibians flying for their lives.

Their shoulders flashed white out of the water, their long hair streaming, and they hurled themselves upon the land. More and more of them came darting upward and landward. Once ashore, they all ran for their lives. In a trice the sea and the foreshore must have been peopled by some two hundred darting and panic-stricken things.

Then, with a heave and a monstrous bulge, the water of the lake was disturbed. A wave seemed to burst its way up from the very depth of the sea, sending great ripples all over the inlet, and rocking the schooner. Vampage sprang forward and threw the anchor over to the nearest building, with his eyes on the water.

The sea heaved and boiled, and from the bowels of the world a vast purple back heaved into sight. It seemed long, rounded, wrinkled, and shining, like the back of a great elephant; but there was a vile, sickly color about it that caught at the throat with disgust. There was a smell, too—a foul, musty smell of immemorial slime.

The disgusting slimy mass heaved itself out of the water. I saw an immense, long, beastly, pulpy bladder of a body, with arms that lashed the water in a mad fury.

Vampage swore, and backed hurriedly toward the companion.

"What is it?" I howled. "What the devil is it?"

"A squid!" he shouted back. "A deep sea octopus! The earthquake kicked it from the bottom to its wrong level. Heaven help us if that monster ever gets a feeler on us! I'm off for the rifle and the explosive bullets."

I stood rooted to the deck with horror. I have seen squids before. I hate them even when they are of ordinary size; but this was gigantic. Perhaps I am exaggerating, but it seemed to me to be bigger than an elephant. It was fabulous. I've never seen anything to approach it. There are no squids of that monstrous and repulsive size in ordinary waters.

This had grown and bloated in the dim, dark caverns at the bottom of the sea. It had lurked there evilly, under the pressure of deep water. Only the force of an earthquake, perhaps, could have heaved the brute to the top.

I watched it lashing out in fury, churning the lake with its mighty feelers. The amphibian people darted hither and thither, in the water and out of it, to escape. I thought they would all get away, but one, coming toward us, stumbled amid the growth on a housetop.

WITH a dart like that of a great spider, the monster flung himself sheer across the water. His long arms rushed into the air, uncoiling like flung ropes. Most of them missed, but one didn't. A tentacle snapped and gripped around a leg—a leg that had a lint bandage on it. The girl screamed and fell, clutching at growths of weed to hold herself against the deadly pull.

The squid, finding her resistant, pulled itself toward her. It slid over the water with evil effortlessness. Other tentacles curled out, gripping solidly here and there. It settled back to pull. I could see its devil face, its cold immobile eyes, its sack-like and horrid mouth.

It pulled, and the girl slipped, screaming. She stabbed at the sucker that held her, with her absurd stone dagger. She dropped the dagger, to clutch at the weeds with both hands again. Her eyes were fixed on me—on me.

The brute monster was pulling inexorably, sure of its prey. I was paralyzed by the horror of it. Vampage was standing at my side now, cool, steady. He sighted his rifle at the thick of the body, so as to have all the flabby mass in the line of the bullet. He fired.

The mountainside above us rang and roared with the explosion, and with the crash of the bullet detonating inside the

squid. I saw fragments of the pulpy flesh fly, but it was like shooting into a jelly, for all the effect it had.

The noise of the explosion nearly did the mischief. The girl screamed in fright, and all the others screamed at the clamor of the rifle and its echoes. She let go, and the monster pulled.

Vampage's second shot rang out, and his third. Each went home and burst, shattering the flaccid mass. The brute was lashing the water with its long arms, but one tentacle held, dragging at the girl.

A fourth shot! I jumped upon the nearest point of land—the roof of the great house the girl was on—and ran, scrambling over the weeds, toward her. She was giving in. The strain of that terrible pull was too much. She had yielded hopelessly, and was being dragged along to that horrible maw. Her slender arms were locked across her eyes.

I slashed with my knife at the tentacle that held her leg. Three savage cuts, and still it was holding on and pulling. The huge, fetid body was hideously close, making me sick.

I slashed again. Another feeler shot uncurling through the air toward me, hissing past my face, missing me by an inch only.

A fifth and a sixth explosive bullet sank into the very substance of that loathsome brute and tore it to pieces. My last slash severed the feeler, but I'll admit that the deadly steadiness of Vampage's shooting did as much to save the girl as my efforts.

The octopus slid off into deep water as its feeler parted. I managed to get the girl to the schooner—she was limp with fright. But we were not yet through with the squid. It reappeared, churning the water into a mad foam. Vampage fired and the great pulpy carcass was blown into fragments before our eyes.

At the tenth shot, the brute seemed to realize from which direction its death was coming. With a gigantic effort it hurled its huge, torn mass right out of the water toward the schooner. I held my breath. Its tentacles were actually upon the rail—one was curling around the mast. It might drag the vessel down into the depths!

Vampage fired again. With admirable coolness he shot straight at the horny mass about the mouth, and the bullet exploded there with shattering effect. A cloud of ink burst from the brute, and the water was clouded for yards; but when it cleared the squid had gone, sunk right out of sight.

X

THE girl waved assurance to her companions and they came stealing over the half submerged housetops toward us, gathering about the schooner. They had been frightened by the shooting.

Vampage had pushed the vessel off a little way.

"If they come crowding aboard," he explained, "they're likely to sink us."

There were, all told, between two and three hundred of the amphibians. All of them, males and females, were between the ages of infanthood and, I should say, thirty-five. We had begun to think that no member of this strange race ever reached the age of forty, when a group of oldish men, surrounding one even older, came through the crowd to the edge of the nearest housetop.

The oldest man wore a diadem of beautiful enamel and gold work, and carried a clublike scepter that made Vampage open his eyes with pleasure. There was reason. That peculiar crown, and the scepter, were the traditional badges of royalty in that ancient valley of the Andes that I have so often mentioned.

"The aged king," Vampage muttered to me, "and his court of priests, wise men, and advisers—and not one of them over fifty! This race is obviously at the end of its run, and we have come just in time."

These old men, in their forties, were wrinkled and shrunk like ancients. They carried all the marks of a degenerating strain. They walked as near to the schooner as possible, while all the other amphibian folk drew back, so that not even the kingly shadow should touch them—a taboo as ancient as the islands.

Since these rulers wanted to speak with us, Vampage ordered Toao to pull the schooner close inshore by the warp.

"We'll have audience with his majesty, Warenne," he said, smiling with anticipation. "A great chance for us! He or some of his courtiers may be scholars. The priests, perhaps, may be full of historic lore. We may have a unique opportunity for learning things!"

"I'll leave that side to you, for the present," I replied. "I'm more inclined to take a few private lessons in their language. I seem to have a unique opportunity for that, too!"

I glanced down at the girl we had rescued. She was sitting in an attitude of half terrified wonder, looking at my watch in her hand. Vampage grinned.

"You're a frivolous devil, Warenne," he said. "Always ready to let exact science slide, if there's a chance of a little philandering! However, I don't know that you're altogether wrong this time. Flirtation is the oldest method of language study."

He was right enough there. I had the happiest day with the dainty and delightful girl. She was really lovely—half fairy, half mermaid, strangely abnormal, and yet human enough. She was full of bird twitterings and raptures as I showed her over the schooner.

Fire frightened her a little, and the smoke of my pipe awed her. I gave her a biscuit, and she thought it was an amulet, until I bit a piece myself. Timidly she followed my example, and then spat it out, in disgust. Its sweetness revolted the taste of a creature who lived in salt water.

Our clothes and the fact that our fingers and toes—I was barefoot—were not webbed, and that we hadn't gills, were things to marvel over constantly. She would not believe that I could not dive under the water, and remain under as long as she could. She was unmistakably grieved at my refusal to dive overboard with her and explore the underwater world. She thought I did not like her well enough.

But I didn't indulge *that* folly. If I got into the deeps with her, she would probably hold me down until I came to the death which Toao insisted was the inevitable end of all who coquetted with such sirens. Her superior swimming powers would master me, and she would hold me under quite innocently, not recognizing that I was differently constructed.

I therefore resolved resolutely on deck and above water. In spite of her seductions, I spent a really happy day—the happiest day I would spend with a queer but adorable girl, who was as unaffected and playful as a child.

Of course, there were strange moments. To find that every now and then she began to pant in the heat, and only recovered after diving into the sea, and disappearing from sight for ten or even twenty minutes, was disturbing. To watch her swimming languidly ten feet under water, and turning on her back and blowing a playful stream of bubbles at me; or to see her suddenly dart like a flash and catch a fish, and hold it and let it go—or, as she did on one occasion come back to the schooner with it and calmly eat it—all this was curious indeed.

It was a bizarre, extravagant, and yet strangely beautiful experience. After a delightful day in the company of that delicate and dainty creature, I can well understand how it is that the myth of the mermaid has always had an alluring and lovely fascination for the race of earth-bound men. Strange, isn't it, that it is always sea maidens, mermaids, never air maids, that call to us? Well, I understand now why that is. This exquisite little creature put a spell on me.

XI

BESIDES, my time wasn't all spent unprofitably. When Vampage returned, I had a notebook vocabulary of phonetic words, taken down as the girl spoke them, which was ahead of anything he had managed.

"Made a good beginning," he said of himself, "but it was very tiring, and not too pleasant."

"I saw that being the guest of kings and

prelates wasn't going to be as pleasant as staying at home," I told him, with a grin. "There was method in my frivolity. What did they do to you?"

"First thing they took me into a big, dark building up in the top town, sat me on a sort of altar, and wailed at me."

"Good Lord! They were making a god of you," I gasped.

"Something like that," he said sourly. "I was uncomfortable, and the proceedings very tedious. It was too dark to make out anything clearly. They don't need light, those—those fishes! They can see in the dark. And I dared not do anything, for fear of scaring them. Then we all went along to that big community house—to the king's chamber in it, I take it. There I was supposed to enjoy a sumptuous banquet. Ugh! It was really a trifle too revolting!"

"I know, Maura—that's the name of the girl, as far as she pronounces it—gave me an exhibition of the local appetite. It is simple but disturbing, eh? You just catch your fish, and eat it then and there. Made me shudder to see those sharp white teeth of hers at work!"

"There was that, of course. All the fish was raw, but there were trimmings, too—queer-looking sea fungus and weeds, horrible jellyfish, sea slugs, and so on. I might have stood up to them cooked; but to bolt them just as nature made them, and some of them alive—ugh! It'll take me a long time to get over it. If I wasn't famished now, I couldn't bear the sight of food!"

It grew very hot and still and sultry as we examined my vocabularies on deck after dinner. Vampage scowled every now and then at the sullen, coppery sky.

"I hope it will give us our chance, after all."

"Hope what will?" I asked, seizing the opportunity to roll a napkin ring along the deck to Maura, who was sitting where our rail had broken down, her feet paddling the water.

"This darned earth disturbance," Vampage growled. "I don't think we're done with these earthquakes, but I do hope that the next will keep off until we have finished our work."

"I hope so, too," I agreed, watching Maura's transports of delight as she handled the shining ring of filigree silver. "I doubt whether we could develop gills as rapidly and as effectively as these amphibians did!"

But Vampage, being a scientist, had no time to think of his own safety.

"We're on the verge of an epoch-making discovery, Warenne," he said. "There is no doubt about that. This vocabulary of yours proves it. It's a first-rate day's work!"

"Oh, a little frivolous humanity is a good servant to science," I grinned.

"Yes," he said, so seriously that I wanted to shout with laughter. "That vocabulary of yours has made the first step in a stupendous discovery, I verily believe. You can see for yourself that it has a definite affinity with the dialect we picked up in Peru. Certain things are called by practically the same word, if we allow for the slight difference in accent. That links up with the things we saw in the upper town here—the script writing, the wall paintings, the images, the vases."

"And the features of the people themselves," I said softly, as I looked at Maura.

"Yes, the features of the people themselves, too. By Jove, it all fits in, Warenne! I'll swear they are the same race. I'll swear that we have hit upon the first people, the earliest civilization, of the Western Hemisphere. Think of it, Warenne! We have unearthed the secret of a great cultured race that dominated, perhaps, from the Peruvian mountains to New Zealand—an empire that ruled all the scattered islands. Perhaps they weren't scattered islands then, but large tracts of land, or even one vast continent. Who knows what these earthquakes may have done with physical geography?"

"In any case," I said dryly, "it is not the duty of a true scientist to weave fairy tales about it. We must still consider them as having always been islands, unless we find differently."

"And we will!" he cried enthusiastically. "Don't you see that, Warenne? The whole history of this unknown and fabled race is ours to read. We've found our Rosetta stone, only it happens to be alive, human, and vocal. Those vocabularies of yours, the additional ones we will collect and perfect through conversations with these people, the translations of the wall writings they will give us —why, Warenne, we shall be able to read the hidden history of half the universe! The Easter Island ideographs will no longer puzzle us, as they have puzzled all the archaeologists until now. We'll translate the unreadable carvings of Yucatan. Do you understand, Warenne? We've found a new world, a new history We are on the verge of gigantic discoveries that may rewrite the entire story of the universe!"

"Yes, I agreed. "It's a big thing—mighty big.

"It's the biggest thing of our time, he bellowed, "and it's ours, if those confounded earthquakes will only keep off.

I didn't answer that. I was looking at Maura. She was standing up, and her dryad breast was panting. She looked at me with frightened eyes, and then gazed wildly away across the water We heard a strange sound—the wailing of fear and woe, the cries of frightened birds.

Maura made a step as if to dive. Then she hesitated, and flung out hands inviting me—a beautiful, heart-rending gesture. Oh, I wanted to go to her, but I knew it meant death, and I shook my head.

She cried out to me a poignant, appealing, warning sentence. The few words I could make out in it seemed to be "hungry monster, "devils, "bowels of the ocean." She wanted me to flee from the anger of that monster to safety I knew I could not escape as she wished me to, and I shook my head.

The wailing, the calling from the amphibian people, rose insistent, demanding. She gave one agonized look at me, uttered a despairing cry, hid her face in her slender arms, and vanished over the side.

Vampage and I stared at each other.

"She said, I muttered huskily, "something about the monster who dwells in the bowels of the ocean."

"The earthquake, of course," Vampage interrupted. "They know—they feel it coming. Better batten everything down, and be ready to cut the warp.

XII

THE earthquake came less than an hour later

I don't think I need to describe it. I

A SKEPTIC IS CONVERTED
ANN: I dread taking this awful-tasting medicine. It leaves me weak as a kitten
RUTH: You're foolish to take a cathartic like that. Try my stand-by . Ex-Lax.
ANN: Why, this tastes just like fine chocolate! But will it really work?
RUTH: Yes, indeed! Ex-Lax is effective—yet it doesn't upset you.
LATER
ANN: Thanks to you and Ex-Lax, I feel wonderful this morning.
RUTH: I knew you would! In our family we all use Ex-Lax! It's so dependable.
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.
10¢ and 25¢
EX-LAX
THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

know I don't want to describe it, because of what it was, because of what it meant.

It was worse than the upheaval that had uncovered the sunken cities of the dead-world. We were tossed through a night and a day in a hell of water, with a great wind trying to blow us under.

Exactly what happened is a mystery. All I know is that as the earth split and gaped, and engulfed the land that was known as the Wahine Rock, we were somehow caught and tossed out of immediate danger by the raging sea that poured across the vanishing land.

Why we didn't shatter against some rock, some projecting portion of the solid old houses, I don't know. I sometimes think we were too insignificant to be destroyed. We simply floated like a microscopic chip or the raging flood. We were whirled and tossed in every direction, but we floated.

Three days later we were still floating, but not quite so well. In fact, the seams had opened again, and the schooner was gaining water at a pace that made our agonized pumping look useless.

However, things were different. Whereas for two days we had been upon a starkly empty ocean, now we were wondering whether the tramp steaming toward us would reach us first, or the schooner sink first. Needless to say, since you are reading this plain narrative, the tramp won.

The steamer had caught the edge of the earthquake disturbance, but the skipper could tell us nothing. He thought it to have been just an ordinary storm.

As he was making for the Chile coast, we had to wait in what patience we could. It wasn't a first-class patience. My notebook with the vocabulary had been reduced to pulp in the storm, and Vampage was nearly out of his wits at finding that the greatest discovery of the age, which had been ours to grasp, had been snatched away.

Perhaps I felt with him, but I don't know. I feel that my own anxiety was a personal one. It was not the loss of a dead history, but of a living entity, that filled me with anxiety.

I needn't draw out the agony. We discovered, as every one who reads newspapers knows, that the earthquakes had been the worst ever known in that region, and that the Peruvian and Chilean coast had suffered horribly, and also the islands far out in the Pacific. We sat quaking as the press gave us daily information of shore lines changed and of whole communities wiped out.

Then came the news we had expected and feared—just a short paragraph, a report from a ship surveying the damage of the earthquake. That paragraph ended our hopes. It told us about the Wahine Rock. It told us that there was now no Wahine Rock.

The Wahine had vanished entirely. The last terrestrial foothold of that unknown race had at last sunk beneath the sea. It was gone. It was wiped out. No longer would it be entered on charts, even as a reef.

Vampage is inconsolable. It left him broken to have that wonderful chance of a lifetime, that tremendous contribution to history and archaeology, wiped out at a single sweep.

I am inconsolable, too—not because of that dead history, but because of a living girl.

Maura! I wonder about her. Was she killed?

Had her race been exterminated? Or do she and her people skim the undersea levels, slender, beautiful, mystic, keeping alive in the minds of frightened men the mystery and the terror of the legend of the Sirens?

I wonder if Maura still haunts South Sea beaches looking for me. If I only knew, I know where I would go.

The Editors' Page

GOOD News for Fantastic Fans!

The complete long stories for which so many readers have been asking will now be given to you in a brand new, 144 page, companion magazine entitled FANTASTIC NOVELS, dated July.

The first issue will contain the famous Hall-Flint classic "The Blind Spot" in complete novel form. It will be on sale May 8th. "The Blind Spot" will be discontinued as a serial in Famous Fantastic Mysteries.

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FANTASTIC NOVELS will be printed every two months. It is planned to publish a procession of famous long classics in this magazine, so those of our readers who have sampled "The Blind Spot" in the three installments running to date in Famous Fantastic Mysteries, will get all the rest of this famous story without waiting for the serial to end. New readers will miss none of it. See notice on contents page.

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"The Blind Spot" has been a collector's item for many years, selling at premium prices ever since its publication in 1921 when all available copies were quickly sold out.

The new magazine, FANTASTIC NOVELS, gives you this rare story for only 25c. And with Finlay illustrations!!!

It is planned to publish the longer of the best classics in FANTASTIC NOVELS. Famous Fantastic Mysteries will also publish the shorter of the complete classics in future issues.

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

This publication will be continued as a bi-monthly magazine, beginning with this issue. (See the readers' comments in this issue.) F.F.M. will use the classic book-length novels, novelets, and short stories *complete* with no change in its format or price. It will continue the Readers' Viewpoint, and other features which have become so popular. No more serials.

And—Messrs. Wolfe, Clark, Arguilla, Mainfort, and the others who have said "F.F.M. is the best mag on the stands, but please don't keep us waiting all those months"—*there will be no more serial installments* to worry you.

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The next issue of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, dated August, will be on sale June 5. It will contain two of the long classic stories which have been in demand, as listed in the advanced announcement of the contents page in this issue.

The two stories scheduled for August are "Darkness and Dawn" complete in four parts, by George Allan England, and the complete novelet by Austin Hall, "The Rebel Soul."

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As most fantastic fans know, "Darkness and Dawn" is the first of a trilogy—the two following stories being "Beyond the Great Oblivion" and "The Afterglow." Reviewing the trilogy, Larry Farsaci, editor of "The Golden Atom," writes:

"Although it (the trilogy) is quite melodramatic in places, the way this atmosphere is handled, interwoven with a philosophical and scientific attempt at explanation, makes it far superior to the average science fiction novel. The fascinating atmosphere which is part of things unknown and strange pervades it. 'Darkness and Dawn' is for those who enjoy such novels as 'Rebirth'—in other words, almost all fans."

"The Rebel Soul" is on a par with "The Blind Spot" and "Almost Immortal."

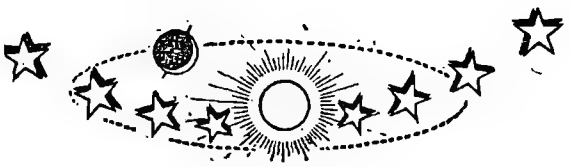
Some consider it even better than the first two.

There are a half dozen complete novels leading the list of F.F.M. readers' "musts." And ahead of all these are "The People of the Atom" by Ray Cummings; the sequel to "The Radio Man" entitled "The Radio Beasts" by Ralph Milne Farley; and several of A. Merritt's stories, including "The Metal Monster" and "The Face in the Abyss" (which is followed by "The Snake Mother.")

The readers know what the repeat requests have been in the Readers' Viewpoint Department.

Everyone seems to have realized that although F.F.M.'s set-up of five to seven stories with two serials running, was highly satisfactory, that the long list of novels would have to be speeded up somehow. The editors hope that this new adjustment will meet the repeated demands. It should, because there is no doubt that the book-length classics are the best.

—THE EDITORS.



SKY-WORLDS

by Larry B. Farsaci

MY GAZE goes out nightly to the stars on high
Peering down through the eyes of soft flame,
Flickering orbs that haunt the vast deeps of sky
And seem to call to me by name.

How enthralling aloof the distant orbs seem;
Gleaming o'er the bleak silent lands,
Their lights still as fairy as in lakes of dream
Imprison me with cosmic bands.

Giving me such longings for sublimer sight,
My love has gone irrecoverably
Out with the pure, intangible, starry light!
World on high, how you beckon me!

"You are so tired—and so hungry," she mourned. "Think no more, messire, until you have eaten and drunk with us and rested for a while."

Three Lines of Old French

By A. MERRITT

Had it been all a dream? Was there no radiant Lucie, save in his own tortured mind?

"BUT rich as was the war for surgical science, ended Hawtry, "opening up through mutilation and torture unexplored regions which the genius of man was quick to enter, and, entering, found ways to checkmate suffering and death—for always, my friends, the distillate from the blood of sacrifice is progress—great as all this was, the world tragedy has opened up still another region wherein even greater knowledge will be found. It was the clinic unsurpassed for the psychologist even more than for the surgeon."

Latour, the great little French doctor, drew himself out of the depths of the big chair the light from the fireplace fell ruddily upon his keen face.

"That is true, he said. "Yes, that is true. There in the furnace the mind of man opened like a flower beneath a too glowing sun. Beaten about in that colossal tempest of primitive forces, caught in the chaos of

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energies both physical and psychical—which, although man himself was its creator, made of their maker a moth in a whirlwind—all those obscure, those mysterious factors of mind which men, for lack of knowledge, have named the soul, were stripped of their inhibitions and given power to appear.

"How could it have been otherwise—when men and women, gripped by one shattering sorrow or joy, will manifest the hidden depths of spirit—how could it have been otherwise in that steadily maintained crescendo of emotion?"

McAndrews spoke.

"Just which psychological region do you mean, Hawtry?" he asked.

There were four of us in front of the fireplace of the Science Club—Hawtry, who rules the chair of psychology in one of our greatest colleges, and whose name is an honored one throughout the world, Latour, an immortal of France; McAndrews, the famous American surgeon whose work during the war has written a new page in the shining book of science; and myself. These are not the names of the three, but they are as I have described them; and I am pledged to identify them no further.

"I mean the field of suggestion," replied the psychologist. "The mental reactions which reveal themselves as visions—an accidental formation in the clouds that becomes to the overwrought imaginations of the beholders the so-eagerly-prayed-for hosts of Joan of Arc marching out from heaven; moonlight in the cloud rift that becomes to the besieged a fiery cross held by the hands of the arch-angels; the despair and hope that are transformed into such a legend as the bowmen of Mons, ghostly archers who with their fantom shafts overwhelm the conquering enemy; wisps of cloud over No Man's Land that are translated by the tired eyes of those who peer out into the shape of the Son of Man himself walking sorrowfully among the dead. Signs, portents, and miracles; the hosts of premonitions, of apparitions of loved ones—all dwellers in this land of suggestion; all born of the tearing loose of the veils of the subconscious. Here, when even a thousandth part is gathered, will be work for the psychological analyst for twenty years."

"And the boundaries of this region?" asked McAndrews.

"Boundaries?" Hawtry plainly was perplexed.

McAndrews for a moment was silent. Then he drew from his pocket a yellow slip of paper, a cablegram.

"Young Peter Laveller died today," he said, apparently irrelevantly. "Died where he had set forth to pass—in the remnants of the trenches that cut through the ancient domain of the Seigniors of Tocquelain, up near Bethune."

"Died there!" Hawtry's astonishment was profound. "But I read that he had been brought home; that, indeed, he was one of your triumphs, McAndrews!"

"I said he went there to die," repeated the surgeon slowly.

SO THAT explained the curious reticence of the Lavellers as to what had become of their soldier son—a secrecy which had puzzled the press for weeks. For young Peter Laveller was one of the nation's heroes. The only boy of old Peter Laveller—and neither is that the real name of the family, for, like the others, I may not reveal it—he was the heir to the grim old coal king's millions, and the secret, best beloved pulse of his heart.

Early in the war he had enlisted with the French. His father's influence might have abrogated the law of the French army that every man must start from the bottom up—I do not know—but young Peter would have none of it. Steady of purpose, burning with the white fire of the first Crusaders, he took his place in the ranks.

Clean-cut, blue-eyed, standing six feet in his stocking-feet, just twenty-five, a bit of a dreamer, perhaps, he was one to strike the imagination of the poilus, and they loved him. Twice was he wounded in the perilous days, and when America came into the war he was transferred to our expedi-

tionary forces. It was at the seige of Mount Kemmel that he received the wounds that brought him back to his father and sister. McAndrews had accompanied him over-sea, I knew, and had patched him together —or so all thought.

What had happened then—and why had Laveller gone back to France, to die, as McAndrews put it?

He thrust the cablegram back into his pocket.

"There is a boundary, John," he said to Hawtry. "Laveller's was a borderland case. I'm going to tell it to you." He hesitated. "I ought not to, maybe; yet I have an idea that Peter would like it told; after all, he believed himself a discoverer." Again he paused; then definitely made up his mind, and turned to me.

"Merritt, you may make use of this if you think it interesting enough. But if you do so decide, then change the names, and be sure to check description short of any possibility of ready identification. After all, it is what happened that is important—if it is important—and those to whom it happened do not matter."

I promised, and I have observed my pledge. I tell the story as he whom I call McAndrews reconstructed it for us there in the shadowed room, while we sat silent until he had ended.

LAVELLER stood behind the parapet of a first-line trench. It was night—an early April night in northern France—and when that is said, all is said to those who have been there.

Beside him was a trench periscope. His gun lay touching it. The periscope is practically useless at night; so through a slit in the sandbags he peered out over the three-hundred-foot-wide stretch of No Man's Land.

Opposite him he knew that other eyes lay close to similar slits in the German parapet, watchful as his were for the least movement.

There were grotesque heaps scattered about No Man's Land, and when the star-shells burst and flooded it with their glare these heaps seemed to stir, to move—some to raise themselves, some to gesticulate, to protest. And this was very horrible, for those who moved under the lights were the dead—French and English, Prussian and Bavarian—dregs of a score of carryings to the red wine-press of war set up in this sector.

There were two Jocks on the entanglements; kilted Scots, one colandered by machine-gun hail just as he was breaking through. The shock of the swift, manifold death had hurled his left arm about the neck of his comrade close beside him; and this man had been stricken within the same second. There they leaned, embracing—and as the star-shells flared and died, they seemed to rock, to try to break from the wire, to dash forward, to return.

Laveller was weary, weary beyond all understanding. The sector was a bad one and nervous. For almost seventy-two hours he had been without sleep—for the few minutes now and then of dead stupor broken by constant alarms was worse than sleep.

The shelling had been well-nigh continuous, and the food scarce and perilous to get, three miles back through the fire they had been forced to go for it; no nearer than that could the ration dumps be brought.

And constantly the parapets had to be rebuilt and the wires repaired—and when this was done the shells destroyed again, and once more the dreary routine had to be gone through; for the orders were to hold this sector at all costs.

All that was left of Laveller's consciousness was concentrated in his eyes; only his seeing faculty lived. And sight, obeying the rigid, inexorable will commanding every reserve of vitality to concentrate on the duty at hand, was blind to everything except the strip before it that Laveller must watch until relieved. His body was numb; he could not feel the ground with his feet, and sometimes he seemed to be floating in air like—like the two Scots upon the wire!

Why couldn't they be still? What right

had men whose blood had drained away into a black stain beneath them to dance and pirouette to the rhythm of the flares? Damn them—why couldn't a shell drop down and bury them?

THERE was a château half a mile up there to the right—at least it had been a château. Under it were deep cellars into which one could creep and sleep. He knew that, because ages ago, when first he had come into this part of the line, he had slept a night there.

It would be like reentering paradise to crawl again into those cellars, out of the pitiless rain; sleep once more with a roof over his head.

"I will sleep and sleep and sleep—and sleep and sleep and sleep," he told himself; then stiffened as at the slumber-compelling repetition of the word darkness began to gather before him.

The star-shells flared and died, flared and died; the staccato of a machine-gun reached him. He thought that it was his teeth chattering until his groping consciousness made him realize what it really was—some nervous German riddling the interminable movement of the dead.

There was a squidging of feet through the chalky mud. No need to look; they were friends, or they could not have passed the sentries at the angle of the traverse. Nevertheless, involuntarily, his eyes swept toward the sounds, took note of three cloaked figures regarding him.

There were a half a dozen of the lights floating overhead now, and by the gleams they cast into the trench he recognized the party.

One of them was that famous surgeon who had come over from the base hospital at Bethune to see made the wounds he healed; the others were his major and his captain—all of them bound for those cellars, no doubt. Well, some had all the luck! Back went his eyes to the slit.

"What's wrong?" It was the voice of his major addressing the visitor.

"What's wrong—what's wrong—what's wrong?" The words repeated themselves swiftly, insistently, within his brain, over and over again, striving to waken it.

Well, what was wrong? Nothing was wrong! Wasn't he, Laveller, there and watching? The tormented brain writhed angrily. Nothing was wrong—why didn't they go away and let him watch in peace?

"Nothing." It was the surgeon—and again the words kept babbling in Laveller's ears, small, whispering, rapidly repeating themselves over and over: "Nothing—nothing—nothing—nothing."

But what was this the surgeon was saying? Fragmentarily, only half understood, the phrases registered:

"Perfect case of what I've been telling you. This lad here—utterly worn, weary—all his consciousness centered upon just one thing—watchfulness consciousness worn to finest point behind it all his subconsciousness crowding to escape consciousness will respond to only one stimulus—movement from without but the subconsciousness, so close to the surface, held so tightly in leash what will it do if that little thread is loosed a perfect case.

What were they talking about? Now they were whispering.

"Then, if I have your permission—" It was the surgeon speaking again. Permission for what? Why didn't they go away and not bother him? Wasn't it hard enough just to watch without having to hear? Something passed before his eyes. He looked at it blindly, unrecognizing. His sight must be clouded.

He raised a hand and brushed at his lids. Yes, it must have been his eyes—for it had gone.

A little circle of light glowed against the parapet near his face. It was cast by a small flash. What were they looking for? A hand appeared in the circle, a hand with long, flexible fingers which held a piece of paper on which there was writing. Did they want him to read, too? Not only watch and hear—but read! He gathered himself together to protest.

Before he could force his stiffened lips to move he felt the upper button of his

greatcoat undone; a hand slipped through the opening and thrust something into his tunic pocket just above the heart.

Someone whispered "Lucie de Tocquelain."

What did it mean? That was not the password.

THERE was a great singing in his head —as though he were sinking through water. What was that light that dazzled him even through his closed lids? Painfully he opened his eyes.

Laveller looked straight into the disk of a golden sun slowly setting over a row of noble oaks. Blinded, he dropped his gaze. He was standing ankle-deep in soft, green grass, starred with small clumps of blue flowerets. Bees buzzed about in their chalices. Little yellow-winged butterflies hovered over them. A gentle breeze blew, warm and fragrant

Oddly he felt no sense of strangeness—then—this was a normal home world—a world as it ought to be. But he remembered that he had once been in another world, far, far unlike this; a place of mystery and pain, of blood-stained mud and filth, of cold and wet; a world of cruelty, whose nights were tortured hells of glaring lights and fiery, slaying sounds, and tormented men who sought for rest and sleep and found none, and dead who danced. Where was it? Had there ever really been such a world? He was not sleepy now.

He raised his hands and looked at them. They were grimed and cut and stained. He was wearing a greatcoat, wet, mud-bespattered, filthy. High boots were on his legs. Beside one dirt-incrusted foot lay a cluster of blue flowerets, half crushed. He groaned in pity, and bent, striving to raise the broken blossoms.

"Too many dead now—too many dead," he whispered; then paused. He had come from that nightmare world! How else in this happy, clean one could he be so unclean?

Of course he had—but where was it? How had he made his way from it here? Ah, there had been a password—

He had it: "Lucie de Tocquelain!"

Laveller cried it aloud—still kneeling.

A soft little hand touched his cheek. A low, sweet-toned voice caressed his ears.

"I am Lucie de Tocquelain," it said. "And the flowers will grow again—yet it is dear of you to sorrow for them."

He sprang to his feet. Beside him stood a girl, a slender maid of eighteen, whose hair was a dusky cloud upon her proud little head and in whose great, brown eyes, resting upon his, tenderness and a half-amused pity dwelt.

Peter stood silent, drinking her in—the low, broad, white forehead; the curved, red lips; the rounded, white shoulders, shining through the silken web of her scarf; the lithe, sweet body of her in the clinging, quaintly fashioned gown, with its high, clasping girdle.

She was fair enough; but to Peter's starved eyes she was more than that—she was a spring gushing from the arid desert, the first cool breeze of twilight over a heat-drenched isle, the first glimpse of paradise to a soul fresh risen from centuries of hell. And under the burning worship of his eyes her own dropped; a faint rose stained the white throat, crept to her dark hair.

"I—I am the Demoiselle de Tocquelain, messire," she murmured. "And you—"

He recovered his courtesy with a shock.

"Laveller—Peter Laveller—is my name, mademoiselle," he stammered. "Pardon my rudeness—but how I came here I know not —nor from whence, save that it was—it was a place unlike this. And you—you are so beautiful, mademoiselle!"

The clear eyes raised themselves for a moment, a touch of roguishness in their depths, then dropped demurely once more —but the blush deepened.

He watched her, all his awakening heart in his eyes; then perplexity awoke, touched him insistently.

"Will you tell me what place this is, mademoiselle," he faltered, "and how I came here, if you—" He stopped. From far, far away, from league upon league of space, a vast weariness was sweeping down upon him. He sensed it coming—closer,

closer; it touched him; it lapped about him; he was sinking under it; being lost—falling—falling—

Two soft, warm hands gripped his. His tired head dropped upon them. Through the little palms that clasped so tightly pulsed rest and strength. The weariness gathered itself, began to withdraw slowly, so slowly—and was gone!

In its wake followed an ineffable, an uncontrollable desire to weep—to weep in relief that the weariness had passed, that the devil world whose shadows still lingered in his mind was behind him, and that he was here with this maid. And his tears fell, bathing the little hands.

Did he feel her head bend to his, her lips touch his hair? Peace came to him. He rose shamefacedly.

"I do not know why I wept, mademoiselle—" he began, and then saw that her white fingers were clasped now in his blackened ones. He released them in sudden panic.

"I am sorry," he stammered. "I ought not to touch you—"

She reached out swiftly, took his hands again in hers, patted them half savagely.

Her eyes flashed.

"I do not see them as you do, Messire Pierre," she answered. "And if I did, are not their stains to me as the stains from hearts of her brave sons on the gonfalons of France? Think no more of your stains save as decorations, messire."

FRANCE—France? Why, that was the name of the world he had left behind; the world where men sought vainly for sleep, and the dead danced.

The dead danced—what did that mean?

He turned wistful eyes to her.

And with a little cry of pity she clung to him for a moment.

"You are so tired—and you are so hungry," she mourned. "And think no more, nor try to remember, messire, till you have eaten and drunk with us and rested for a while."

They had turned. And now Laveller saw not far away a château. It was pinnacled and stately, serene in its gray stone and lordly with its spires and slender turrets thrust skyward from its crestlike plumes flung high from some proud prince's helm. Hand in hand like children the Demoiselle de Tocquelain and Peter Laveller approached it over the greensward.

"It is my home, messire," the girl said. "And there among the roses my mother awaits us. My father is away, and he will be sorrowful that he met you not, but you shall meet him when you return."

He was to return, then? That meant he was not to stay. But where was he to go—from whence was he to return? His mind groped blindly; cleared again. He was walking among roses; there were roses everywhere, great, fragrant, opened blooms of scarlets and of saffrons, of shell pinks and white; clusters and banks of them, climbing up the terraces, masking the base of the château with perfumed tide.

And as he and the maid, still hand in hand, passed between them, they came to a table dressed with snowy napery and pale porcelains beneath a bower.

A woman sat there. She was a little past the prime of life, Peter thought. Her hair, he saw, was powdered white, her cheeks as pink and white as a child's, her eyes the sparkling brown of those of the demoiselle—and gracious—gracious, Peter thought, as some grande dame of old France.

The demoiselle dropped her low curtsy.

"*Ma mère,*" she said, "I bring you the Sieur Pierre la Valliere, a very brave and gallant gentleman who has come to visit us for a little while."

The clear eyes of the older woman scanned him, searched him. Then the stately white head bowed, and over the table a délicate hand was stretched toward him.

It was meant for him to kiss, he knew—but he hesitated awkwardly, miserably, looking at his begrimed own.

"The Sieur Pierre will not see himself as we do," the girl said in half merry reproof; then she laughed, a caressing, golden chiming. "*Ma mère,* shall he see his hands as we do?"

The white-haired woman smiled and nodded, her eyes kindly and, Laveller noted, with that same pity in them as had been in those of the demoiselle when first he had turned and beheld her.

The girl touched Peter's eyes lightly, held his palms up before him—they were white and fine and clean and in some unfamiliar way beautiful!

Again the indefinable amaze stifled him, but his breeding told. He conquered the sense of strangeness, bowed from the hips, took the dainty fingers of the stately lady in his, and raised them to his lips.

She struck a silver bell. Through the roses came two tall men in livery, who took from Laveller his greatcoat. They were followed by four small black boys in gay scarlet slashed with gold. They bore silver platters on which were meat and fine white bread and cakes, fruit, and wine in tall crystal flagons.

And Laveller remembered how hungry he was. But of that feast he remembered little—up to a certain point. He knows that he sat there filled with a happiness and content that surpassed the sum of happiness of all his twenty-five years.

The mother spoke little, but the Demoiselle Lucie and Peter Laveller chattered and laughed like children—when they were not silent and drinking each the other in.

And ever in Laveller's heart an adoration for this maid met so perplexingly grew—grew until it seemed that his heart could not hold his joy. Ever the maid's eyes as they rested on his were softer, more tender, filled with promise; and the proud face beneath the snowy hair became, as it watched them, the essence of that infinitely gentle sweetness that is the soul of the madonnas.

AT LAST the Demoiselle de Tocquelain, glancing up and meeting that gaze, blushed, cast down her long lashes, and then raised her eyes bravely.

"Are you content, my mother?" she asked gravely.

"My daughter, I am well content," came the smiling answer.

Swiftly followed the incredible, the terrible—in that scene of beauty and peace it was, said Laveller, like the flashing forth of a gorilla's paw upon a virgin's breast, a wail from deepest hell lancing through the song of angels.

At his right, among the roses, a light began to gleam—a fitful, flaring light that glared and died, glared and died. In it were two shapes. One had an arm clasped about the neck of the other; they leaned embracing in the light, and as it waxed and waned they seemed to pirouette, to try to break from it, to dash forward, to return—to dance!

The dead who danced!

A world where men sought rest and sleep, and could find neither, and where even the dead could find no rest, but must dance to the rhythm of the star-shells!

He groaned; sprang to his feet; watched, quivering in every nerve. Girl and woman followed his rigid gaze; turned to him again with tear-filled, pitiful eyes.

"It is nothing!" said the maid. "It is nothing! See—there is nothing there!"

Once more she touched his lids; and the light and the swaying forms were gone. But now Laveller knew. Back into his consciousness rushed the full tide of memory—memory of the filth and the mud, the stenches, the fiery, slaying sounds, the cruelty, the misery and the hatreds; memory of torn men and tormented dead; memory of whence he had come, the trenches.

The trenches! He had fallen asleep, and all this was but a dream! He was sleeping at his post, while his comrades were trusting him to watch over them. And those two ghastly shapes among the roses—they were the two Scots on the wires summoning him back to his duty; beckoning, beckoning him to return. He must waken! He must waken!

Desperately he strove to drive himself from his garden of illusion; to force himself back to that devil world which during this hour of enchantment had been to his mind only as a fog bank on a far horizon. And as he struggled, the brown-eyed maid

and the snowy-tressed woman watched—with ineffable pity, tears falling.

"The trenches!" gasped Laveller. "O God, wake me up! I must get back! O God, make me wake!"

"Am I only a dream, then, *ma mie?*"

It was the Demoiselle Lucie's voice—a bit piteous, the golden tones shaken.

"I must get back," he groaned—although at her question his heart seemed to die within him. "Let me wake!"

"Am I a dream?" Now the voice was angry; the demoiselle drew closer. "Am I not real?"

A little foot stamped furiously on his, a little hand darted out, pinched him viciously close above his elbow. He felt the sting of the pain and rubbed it, gazing at her stupidly.

"Am I a dream, think you?" she murmured, and, raising her palms, set them on his temples, bringing down his head until his eyes looked straight into hers.

Laveller gazed—gazed down, down deep into their depths, lost himself in them, felt his heart rise like the spring from what he saw there. Her warm, sweet breath fanned his cheek; whatever this was, wherever he was—she was no dream!

"But I must return—get back to my trench!" The soldier in him clung to the necessity.

"My son"—it was the mother speaking now—"my son, you are in your trench."

Laveller gazed at her, bewildered. His eyes swept the lovely scene about him. When he turned to her again it was with the look of a sorely perplexed child. She smiled.

"Have no fear, she said. "Everything is well. You are in your trench—but your trench centuries ago; yes, twice a hundred years ago, counting time as you do—and as once we did."

A chill ran through him. Were they mad? Was he mad? His arm slipped down over a soft shoulder; the touch steadied him.

"And you?" he forced himself to ask.

He caught a swift glance between the two, and in answer to some unspoken question the mother nodded. The Demoiselle Lucie pressed soft hands against Peter's face, looked again into his eyes.

"*Ma mie,*" she said gently, "we have been"—she hesitated— "what you call—dead—to your world these two hundred years!"

But before she had spoken the words Laveller, I think, had sensed what was coming. And if for a fleeting instant he had felt a touch of ice in every vein, it vanished beneath the exaltation that raced through him, vanished as frost beneath mist-scattering sun. For if this were true—why, then there was no such thing as death! And it was true!

It was true! He knew it with a shining certainty that had upon it not the shadow of a shadow—but how much his desire to believe entered into his certainty who can tell?

HE LOOKED at the château. Of course! It was that whose ruins loomed out of the darkness when the flares split the night—in whose cellars he had longed to sleep. Death—oh, the foolish, fearful hearts of men!—this death? This glorious place of peace and beauty?

And this wondrous girl whose brown eyes were the keys of heart's desire! Death—he laughed and laughed again.

Another thought struck him, swept through him like a torrent. He must get back, must get back to the trenches and tell them this great truth he had found. Why, he was like a traveler from a dying world who unwittingly stumbles upon a secret to turn that world dead to hope into a living heaven!

There was no longer need for men fear the splintering shell, the fire that seared them, the bullets, or the shining steel. What did they matter when this—this—was the truth? He must get back and tell them. Even those two Scots would lie still on the wires when he whispered this to them.

But he forgot—they knew now. But they could not return to tell—as he could. He was wild with joy, exultant, lifted up to

the skies, a demigod—the bearer of a truth that would free the devil-ridden world from its demons; a new Prometheus who bore back to mankind a more precious flame than had the old.

"I must go!" he cried. "I must tell them! Show me how to return—swiftly!"

A doubt assailed him; he pondered it.

"But they may not believe me," he whispered. "No, I must show them the proof. I must carry something back to prove this to them."

The Lady of Tocquelain smiled. She lifted a little knife from the table and, reaching over to a rose-tree, cut from it a cluster of buds; thrust it toward his eager hand.

Before he could grasp it the maid had taken it. "Wait!" she murmured. "I will give you another message.

There was a quill and ink upon the table, and Peter wondered how they had come; he had not seen them before—but with so many wonders, what was this small one? There was a slip of paper in the Demoiselle Lucie's hand, too. She bent her little, dusky head and wrote; blew upon the paper, waved it in the air to dry it; sighed, smiled at Peter, and wrapped it about the stem of the rosebud cluster; placed it on the table, and waved back Peter's questing hand.

"Your coat," she said. "You will need it—for now you must go back."

She thrust his arms into the garment. She was laughing—but there were tears in the great, brown eyes; the red mouth was very wistful.

Now the older woman rose, stretched out her hand again; Laveller bent over it, kissed it.

"We shall be here waiting for you, my son," she said softly. "When it is time for you to—come back."

He reached for the roses with the paper wrapped around their stem. The maid darted a hand over his, lifted them before he could touch them.

"You must not read it until you have gone," she said—and again the rose flame burned throat and cheeks.

Hand in hand, like children, they sped over the greensward to where Peter had first met her. There they stopped, regarding each other gravely—and then that other miracle which had happened to Laveller and that he had forgotten in the shock of his wider realization called for utterance.

"I love you!" whispered Peter Laveller to this living, long-dead Demoiselle de Tocquelain.

She sighed and was in his arms.

"Oh, I know you do!" she cried. "I know you do, dear one—but I was so afraid you would go without telling me so."

She raised her sweet lips, pressed them long to his; drew back.

"I loved you from the moment I first saw you standing here," she told him, "and I will be here waiting for you when you return. And now you must go, dear love of mine; but wait—"

He felt a hand steal into the pocket of his tunic, pressing something over his heart.

"The messages," she said. "Take them. And remember—I will wait. I promise, I, Lucie de Tocquelain—"

THERE was a singing in his head. He opened his eyes. He was back in his trench, and in his ears still rang the name of the demoiselle, and over his heart he felt still the pressure of her hand. His head was half turned toward three men who were regarding him.

One of them had a watch in his hand; it was the surgeon. Why was he looking at his watch? Had he been gone long?

Well, what did it matter, when he was the bearer of such a message? His weariness had gone; he was transformed, jubilant; his soul was shouting pæans. Forgetting discipline, he sprang toward the three.

"There is no such thing as death!" he cried. "We must send this message along the lines—at once! At once, do you understand? Tell it to the world—I have proof—"

He stammered and choked in his eagerness. The three glanced at each other. His major lifted his electric flash, clicked it in Peter's face, started oddly—then quietly walked over and stood between the lad and his rifle.

"Just get your breath a moment, my boy, and then tell us all about it," he said.

They were devilishly unconcerned, were they not? Well, wait till they had heard what he had to tell them!

And tell them Peter did, leaving out only what had passed between him and the demoiselle—for, after all, wasn't that their own personal affair? And gravely and silently they listened to him. But always the trouble deepened in his major's eyes as Laveller poured forth the story.

"And then—I came back, came back as quickly as I could, to help us all; to lift us out of all of this"—his hands swept out in a wide gesture of disgust—"for none of it matters! When we die—we live!" he ended.

Upon the face of the man of science rested profound satisfaction.

"A perfect demonstration; better than I could have ever hoped!" he spoke over Laveller's head to the major. "Great, how great is the imagination of man!"

There was a tinge of awe in his voice.

Imagination? Peter was cut to the sensitive, vibrant soul of him.

They didn't believe him! He would show them.

"But I have the proof!" he cried.

He threw open his greatcoat, ran his hand into his tunic-pocket; his fingers closed over a bit of paper wrapped around a stem. Ah—now he would show them!

He drew it out, thrust it toward them.

"Look!" His voice was like a triumphal trumpet-call.

What was the matter with them? Could they not see? Why did their eyes search his face instead of realizing what he was offering them? He looked at what he held—then, incredulous, brought it close to his own eyes—gazed and gazed, with a sound in his ears as though the universe were slipping away around him, with a heart that seemed to have forgotten to beat. For in his hand, stem wrapped in paper, was no fresh and fragrant rosebud cluster his brown-eyed demoiselle's mother had clipped for him in the garden.

No—there was but a sprig of artificial buds, worn and torn and stained, faded and old!

A great numbness crept over Peter.

Dumbly he looked at the surgeon, at his captain, at the major whose face was now troubled indeed and somewhat stern.

"What does it mean?" he muttered.

HAD it all been a dream? Was there no radiant Lucie—save in his own mind—no brown-eyed maid who loved him and whom he loved?

The scientist stepped forward, took the worn sprig from the relaxed grip. The bit of paper slipped off, remained in Peter's fingers.

"You certainly deserve to know just what you've been through, my boy," the urbane, capable voice beat upon his dulled hearing. "after such a reaction as you have provided to our little experiment. He laughed pleasantly.

Experiment? Experiment? A dull rage began to grow in Peter—vicious, slowly rising.

"Messieur!" called the major appealingly, somewhat warningly, it seemed, to his distinguished visitor

"Oh, by your leave, major," went on the great man, "here is a lad of high intelligence—of education, you could know that by the way he expressed himself—he will understand."

The major was not a scientist—he was a Frenchman, human, and with an imagination of his own. He shrugged; but he moved a little closer to the resting rifle.

"We had been discussing, your officers and I," the capable voice went on, "dreams that are the half-awakened mind's effort to explain some touch, some unfamiliar sound, or what not that has aroused it from its sleep. One is slumbering, say, and a window near by is broken. The sleeper hears, the consciousness endeavors to learn—but

it has given over its control to the subconscious. And this rises accomodatingly to its mate's assistance. But it is irresponsible, and it can express itself only in pictures.

"It takes the sound and—well, weaves a little romance around it. It does its best to explain—alas! its best is only a more or less fantastic lie—recognized as such by the consciousness the moment it becomes awake.

"And the movement of the subconsciousness in this picture production is inconceivably rapid. It can depict in the fraction of a second a series of incidents that if actually lived would take hours—yes, days—of time. You follow me, do you not? Perhaps you recognize the experience I outline?"

Laveller nodded. The bitter, consuming rage was mounting within him steadily. But he was outwardly calm, all alert. He would hear what this self-satisfied devil had done to him, and then—

"Your officers disagreed with some of my conclusions. I saw you here, weary, concentrated upon the duty at hand, half in hypnosis from the strain and the steady flaring and dying of the lights. You offered a perfect clinical subject, a laboratory test unexcelled—"

Could he keep his hands from his throat until he had finished? Laveller wondered. Lucie, his Lucie, a fantastic lie—

"Steady, *mon vieux*"—it was his major whispering. Ah, when he struck, he must do it quickly—his officer was too close, too close. Still—he must keep his watch for him through the slit. He would be peering there, perhaps, when he, Peter, leaped.

"And so"—the surgeon's tones were in his best student-clinic manner— "and so I took a little sprig of artificial flowers that I had found pressed between the leaves of an old missal I had picked up in the ruins of the château yonder. On a slip of paper I wrote a line of French—for then I thought you a French soldier. It was a simple line from the ballad of Aucassin and Nicolette—

"And there she waits to greet him when all his days are run.

"Also, there was a name written on the title-page of the missal, the name, no doubt, of its long-dead owner—'Lucie de Tocquelain'—"

LUCIE! Peter's rage and hatred were beaten back by a great surge of longing—rushed back stronger than ever.

"So I passed the sprig of flowers before your unseeeing eyes; consciously unseeing, I mean, for it was certain your subconsciousness would take note of them. I showed you the line of writing—your subconsciousness absorbed this, too, with its suggestion of a love troth, a separation, an awaiting. I wrapped it about the stem of the sprig, I thrust them both into your pocket, and called the name of Lucie de Tocquelain into your ear.

"The problem was what your other self would make of those four things—the ancient cluster, the suggestion in the line of writing, the touch, and the name—a fascinating problem, indeed!

"And hardly had I withdrawn my hand, almost before my lips closed on the word I had whispered—you had turned to us shouting that there was no such thing as death, and pouring out, like one inspired, that remarkable story of yours—all, all built by your imagination from—"

But he got no further. The searing rage in Laveller had burst all bounds, had flared forth murderously and hurled him silently at the surgeon's throat. There were flashes of flame before his eyes—red, sparkling sheets of flame. He would die for it, but he would kill this cold-blooded fiend who could take a man out of hell, open up to him heaven, and then thrust him back into hell grown now a hundred times more cruel, with all hope dead in him for eternity.

Before he could strike strong hands gripped him, held him fast. The scarlet, curtained flares before his eyes faded away. He thought he heard a tender, golden voice whispering to him:

"It is nothing! It is nothing! See as I do!"

He was standing between his officers,

who held him fast on each side. They were silent, looking at the now white-faced surgeon with more than somewhat of cold, unfriendly sternness in their eyes.

"My boy, my boy"—that scientist's poise was gone; his voice trembling, agitated. "I did not understand—I am sorry—I never thought you would take it so seriously."

Laveller spoke to his officers—quietly. "It is over, sirs. You need not hold me."

They looked at him, released him, patted him on the shoulder, fixed again their visitor with that same cold scrutiny.

Laveller turned stumbling to the parapet. His eyes were full of tears. Brain and heart and soul were nothing but a blind desolation, a waste utterly barren of hope. That message of his, the sacred truth that was to set the feet of a tormented world on the path to paradise—a dream.

His Lucie, his brown-eyed demoiselle who had murmured her love for him—a thing compounded of a word, a touch, a writing; and an artificial flower!

He could not, would not believe it. Why, he could feel still the touch of her soft lips on his, her warm body quivering in his arms. And she had said he would come back—and promised to wait for him.

What was that in his hand? It was the paper that had wrapped the rose-buds—the cursed paper with which that cold devil had experimented with him.

Laveller crumpled it savagely—raised it to hurl it as his feet.

Some one seemed to stay his hand.

Slowly he opened it.

The three men watching him saw a glory steal over his face, a radiance like that of a soul redeemed from endless torture. All its sorrow, its agony, was wiped out, leaving it a boy's once more.

He stood wide-eyed, dreaming.

The major stepped forward, gently drew the paper from Laveller.

There were many star-shells floating on high now, the trench was filled with their glare, and in their light he scanned the fragment.

On his face when he raised it was a great awe—and as they took it from him and read this same awe dropped down upon the others like a veil.

For over the line the surgeon had written were now three other lines—in old French—

> Nor grieve, dear heart, nor fear the seeming—
> Here is waking after dreaming.
> She who loves you, Lucie.

THAT was McAndrew's story, and it was Hawtry who finally broke the silence that followed his telling of it.

"The lines had been on the paper, of course," he said; "they were probably faint, and your surgeon had not noticed them. It was drizzling, and the dampness brought them out."

"No," answered McAndrews; "they had not been there."

"But how can you be so sure?" remonstrated the psychologist.

"Because I was the surgeon," said McAndrews quietly. "The paper was a page torn from my note-book. When I wrapped it around the sprig it was blank—except for the line I myself had written there.

"But there was one more bit of—well, shall we call it evidence, John?—the hand in which Laveller's message was penned was the hand in the missal in which I had found the flowers—and the signature 'Lucie' was that same signature, curve for curve and quaint, old-fashioned angle for angle."

A longer silence fell, broken once more by Hawtry, abruptly.

"What became of the paper?" he asked. "Was the ink analyzed? Was—"

"As we stood there wondering," interrupted McAndrews, "a squall swept down upon the trench. It tore the paper from my hand; carried it away. Laveller watched it go; made no effort to get it."

" 'It does not matter. I know now,' he said—and smiled at me, the forgiving happy smile of a joyous boy. 'I apologize to you, doctor. You're the best friend I ever had. I thought at first you had done to me what no other man would do to

another—I see now that you have done for me what no other man could.

"And that is all. He went through the war neither seeking death nor avoiding it. I loved him like a son. He would have died after that Mount Kemmel affair had it not been for me. He wanted to live long enough to bid his father and sister good-bye, and I—patched him up. He did it, and then set forth for the trench beneath the shadow of the ruined old château where his brown-eyed demoiselle had found him.

"Why?" asked Hawtry.

"Because he thought that from there he could go back — to Lucie more quickly

"To me an absolutely unwarranted conclusion, said the psychologist, wholly irritated, half angry "There is some simple, natural explanation of it all."

"Of course, John, answered McAndrews soothingly— "of course there is. Tell us it, can't you?"

But Hawtry, it seemed, could not offer any particulars.

"You always look slick as a whistle,
What can I do for my tough bristle?"
"The Thin Gillette will end your trouble
With thrift and ease it whisks off stubble"
Precision made to fit your Gillette Razor exactly!
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
Gillette
4 for 10c
8 for 19c
The Thin Gillette Blade Is Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

A. Merritt

Author of "The Ship of Ishtar," "Seven Footprints to Satan," "The Face in the Abyss," "The Snake Mother," etc.

This is Mr. Merritt's autobiographical sketch which originally appeared in "The Men Who Make The Argosy," brought up to date for FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

THE "A" stands for Abraham. It happened this way. The family on both sides were Quakers. Whenever anybody was born the Bible was taken down and the chapter of "Begats" consulted. His mother's mother headed a revolt and named her children Ida, Phoebe, Ella and Philip—she liked the Greeks. She got away with it by sheer force of character, but when Ida's son was born the conservatives on both sides surged in. As a result the helpless infant was named Abraham after his grandfather. He was lucky, because that was a compromise between Job and Hezekiah.

General Wesley Merritt was his granduncle and Fenimore Cooper only a little farther back in his family tree. After having saddled him with the name of Abraham, the family thought he ought to be a lawyer. Why not? Some day he might be President. Abraham Lincoln had the same number of letters in his name as Abraham Merritt. What could be more logical?

So after going through Philadelphia High, he matriculated for the University of Pennsylvania law school. Almost immediately thereafter his whole family went broke. There was nothing to do about it, so he did it. He went into the newspaper game at the tender age of eighteen. In those days writing was paid for at the rate of five dollars a column and twenty dollars a week was affluence.

Two reporters took him in hand and taught him the art of the interwritten story—that is, one the harassed copy reader could not cut. This was not altruism on their part, because the more money he could make the more they could borrow. He served a little over a year of this peonage, but has never regretted the cost of the training.

Newspapers were newspapers in those days, and politics were politics. It happened he saw one day something that made it awkward to have him within reach of the witness stand. The result was that he spent a happy year at no expense to himself wandering around Central America, poking into ruins, getting in and out of tight places and acquiring a taste for archeology Also a rather unusual cargo of Mayan, Aztec and, later, Incan legends and the kind of history not taught in the schools. During that time he gained a curious knowledge of Indian customs, religious ceremonies that would have made his Quaker ancestors stand on end, and also an equally intimate knowledge of the interiors of palaces, wine shops, haciendas, huts, the jungle and once or twice the *cabozo* or jail.

RETURNING reluctantly north, he resumed his newspaper fetters, and became immersed in a succession of murder mysteries, suicides, coal strikes, minor and major catastrophies and executions. He unfortunately developed a talent for writing up these latter so vividly that he was always assigned to them. He wrote them vividly because he loathed them. His procedure was always the same. He would attend the ceremony strongly fortified. He would return and write the story, resign with dignity and at once finish his fortification with a complete plasterization. He would return in a couple of days with the wound in his soul scarred over, and that would be all of that till the next hanging. Between times he would seek relief from

this dark life of crime and catastrophe by jaunts back to the jungle, and in study of science, of color and of music.

After a few years of this he went to New York, becoming the assistant of the famous Morrill Goddard, editor of The American Weekly. When Mr. Goddard died about three years ago, he became the editor of The American Weekly and points with pride to the fact that its circulation shows no decrease. A. Merritt thinks that Morrill Goddard was the second greatest of newspaper magazine editors; he thinks the first is Mr. Hearst. He thinks he owes Mr. Goddard a debt of gratitude for patient training that he can never repay; he also quite often thinks life would probably have been and would be far more spectacular if he had never gotten the training.

When he took up the editorship, he had three novels under way—one a story of Chinese sorcery, one of demonic possession and one laid in Yucatan with a little known legend as background. One was half finished. He has not added one word to any of them for thirty months.

His wife shares his tastes, especially for a key down on the West Coast of Florida of which they own some twenty acres shared by pelicans, cranes and herons, porpoises, sharks, cardinals and mocking birds and extremely large and hairy spiders, butterflies and palmetto bugs which can and sometimes do go through a pair of pants in a night, tarpon, mackerel, stone crabs and assorted jelly-fish, and in season mosquitoes, gnats and scorpions. When his wife doesn't share his tastes, which is quite often, she is tolerant of them. He has a daughter, eighteen and very ornamental. He also has a citrus farm down near Clearwater, which although its fruit is a beautiful yellow shows increasingly in the red. However, he points out that if the worst comes to the worst, he can always eat by catching fish off the key, shaking down the oranges and grapefruit. Some of the neighbors raise chickens and there is a species of land turtle which makes fine soup.

AS FOR the rest, he is somewhat of an authority upon folklore and mythology, archeology, Central and South American history and customs, a fair astronomer and a good botanist with a smattering of other sciences. He has made an intensive study of ancient sorcery, medieval magic and witchcraft in both its past and present aspects; often on the spot. He is a member of one northern Panama Indian tribe and a tribe of Guatamalan Indians, descendants of one of ancient Mayan peoples—no fooling!

He dislikes all violent exercises including bridge, and never walks if he can ride or be carried.

He keeps bees.

When he wrote he wrote slowly and primarily to please himself — which is largely, he says, why he wrote so little. And whenever he finished a story he was profoundly depressed for a time because it was no better. All except his novelette "The Woman of the Wood" which he admits unblushingly is "100 per cent perfect fantasy."

Now and then he toys with the idea of grabbing family and typewriter under arms and migrating to the key and writing again. Maybe he will—who knows?

The Blind Spot

By AUSTIN HALL and HOMER EON FLINT

Part III

Was the Blind Spot a door between our world and another, a shadow-world that is peopled by fantoms of reality?

CHAPTER XIX

HOBART FENTON TAKES UP THE TALE

RIGHT here at the outset, I had better make a clean breast of something which the reader will very soon suspect, anyhow: I am a plain, unpoetic, blunt-speaking man, trained as a civil engineer, and in most respects totally dissimilar from the man who wrote the first account of the Blind Spot.

Harry had already touched upon this. He came of an artistic, esthetic family; the Wendels were all culture. I think Harry must have taken up law in the hope that the old saying would prove true: "The only certain thing about law is its uncertainty." For he dearly loved the mysterious, the unknowable; he liked uncertainty for its excitement; and it is a mighty good thing that he was honest, for he would have made a highly dangerous crook.

Observe that I use the past tense in referring to my old friend. I do this in the interests of strict, scientific accuracy, to satisfy those who would contend that, having utterly vanished from sight and sound of man, Harry Wendel is no more.

But, in my own heart is the firm conviction that he is still very much alive.

Within an hour of his astounding disappearance, my sister, Charlotte, and I made our way to a hotel; and despite the terrible nature of what had happened, we managed to get a few hours' rest. The following morning Charlotte declared herself quite strong enough to discuss the situation. We lost no time.

It will be remembered that I had spent nearly the whole of the preceding year in South America, putting through an irrigation scheme. Thus, I knew little of what had occurred in that interval. On the other hand, Harry and I had never seen fit to take Charlotte into our confidence as, I now see, we should have done.

So we fairly pounced upon the manuscript which Harry had left behind. This manuscript is now in the hands of the publishers, together with a sort of post-script, written by Charlotte, describing the final events of that tragic night in the house at 288 Chatteron Place, when Harry so mysteriously vanished.

Of course the disappearance of Dr. Holcomb—the initial victim of the Blind Spot—has always been public property. Not so the second vanishing—that of Albert Watson, known to us as Chick. His connection with the mystery has heretofore been kept from the world. And the same is true of Harry's going.

Hence the reader will readily imagine the intense interest with which Charlotte and I traced Harry's account. And by the time we had finished reading it, I, for one, had reached one solid conclusion.

"I'm convinced, sis, that the stranger—Rhamda Avec—is an out-and-out villain. Despite his agreeable ways, and all, I think he was solely and deliberately to blame for professor Holcomb's disappearance. Consequently, this Rhamda is, in himself, a very valuable clue as to Harry's present predicament."

And I related some additional details of the struggle which took place between us two football players and the wonderfully

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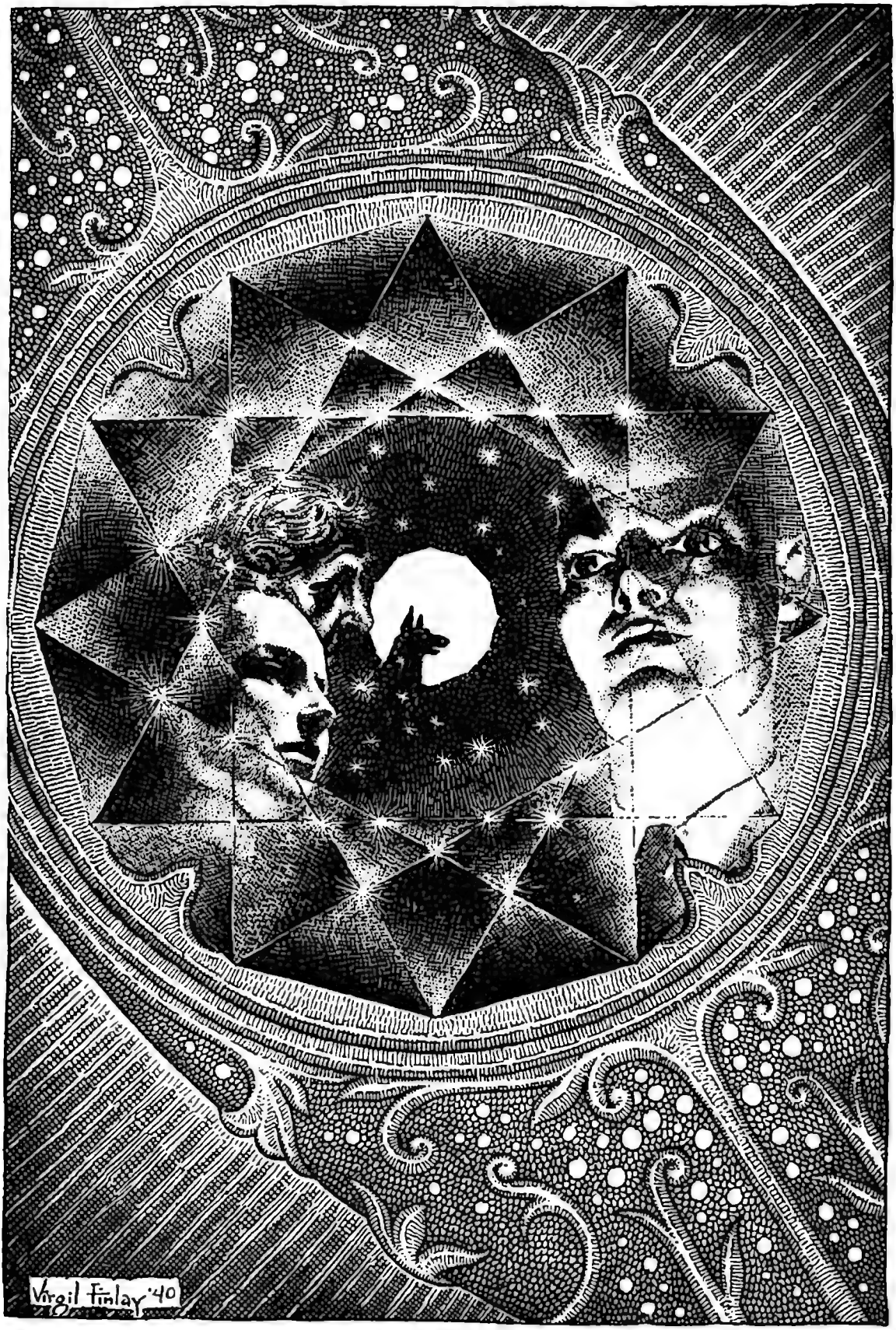


There were the four who had disappeared into the Blind Spot—or their images—showing plainly within the strange blue depths of the ring! Were they, then, still alive?

strong and agile Rhamda. I showed the scar of a certain memorable scratch on my neck.

"Proof that he's a pretty substanial sort of a fantom," I said. (It will be recalled that Jerome, the detective, who was the first man to see the Rhamda, considered Avec to be supernatural.) "Fantoms don't generally possess finger-nails!"

Referring to Harry's notes, I pointed out something which bore on this same point. This was the fact that, although Avec had often been seen on the streets of San Francisco, yet the police had never been able to lay hands on him. This seemed to indicate that the man might possess the power of actually making himself visible or invisible, at will.

"Only"—I was careful to add—"understand, I don't rank him as a magician, or sorcerer; nothing like that. I'd rather think that he's merely in possession of a scientific secret, no more wonderful in itself than, say, wireless. He's merely got hold of it in advance of the others; that's all."

"Then you think that the woman, too, is human?"

"The Nervina?" I hesitated. "Perhaps you know more of this part of the thing than I do, sis.

"I only know"—slowly—"that she came and told me that Harry was soon to call. And somehow, I never felt jealous of her, Hobart." Then she added: "At the same time, I can understand that Harry might —might have fallen in love with her. She —she was very beautiful."

Charlotte is a brave girl. There were tears in here eyes, as she spoke of her lover, but she kept her voice as steady as my own.

We next discussed the disappearance of Chick Watson. These details are already familiar to the reader of Harry's story; likewise what happened to Queen, his Australian shepherd. Like the other vanishings, it was followed by a single stroke on that prodigious, invisible bell — what Harry calls "the Bell of the Blind Spot." And he has already mentioned my opinion, that this phenomenon signifies the closing of the portal of the unknown—the end of the special conditions which produce the bluish spot on the ceiling, the incandescent streak of light, and the vanishing of whoever falls into the affected region. The mere fact that no trace of the bell ever was found has not shaken that opinion.

And thus we reached the final disappearance, that which took away Harry. Charlotte contrived to keep her voice as resolute as before, as she said:

"He and the Nervina vanished together. I turned around just as she rushed in, crying out, 'I can't let you go alone! I'll save you, even beyond. That's all she said, before—it happened."

"You saw nothing of the Rhamda then, sis?"

"No.

And we had neither seen nor heard of him since. Until we got in touch with him, one important clue as to Harry's fate was out of our reach. There remained to us just one thread of hope—the ring, which Charlotte was now wearing on her finger.

Harry has already described this jewel, but it will not hurt to repeat the details. The ring is remarkable solely for the gem, a large, uncut stone more or less like a sapphire, except that it is a very pale blue indeed. I hardly know how to describe that tint; there is something elusive about it, depending largely upon the conditions of the light, together with some other variable quality—I realize that this seems impossible—a quality which lies in the stone itself, always changing, almost alive. Nevertheless, the stone is not scintillating; it is uncut. It emits a light which is not a gleam, much less a flame; it is a dull glow, if you can imagine a pale blue stone emitting so weird a quality.

I LIT a match and held it to the face of the gem. As happened many times before, the stone exhibited its most astounding quality. As soon as faintly heated, the surface at first clouded, then cleared in a curious fashion, revealing a startlingly distinct, miniature likeness of the four who had vanished into the Blind Spot.

I make no attempt to explain this. Somehow or other, that stone possesses a telescopic quality which brings to a focus, right in front of the beholder's eyes, a tiny "close-up" of our departed friends. Also, the gem magnifies what it reveals, so that there is not the slightest doubt that Dr. Holcomb, Chick Watson, Queen and Harry Wendel are actually reproduced — I shall not say, contained—in that gem. Neither shall I say that they are reflected; they are simply reproduced there.

Also, it should be understood that their images are living. Only the heads and shoulders of the men are to be seen; but there is animation of the features, such as cannot be mistaken. Granted that these four vanished in the Blind Spot—whatever that is—and granted that this ring is some inexplicable window or vestibule between that locality and this commonplace world of ours, then, manifestly, it would seem that all four are still alive.

"I am sure of it!" declared Charlotte, managing to smile, wistfully, at the living reproduction of her sweetheart. "And I think Harry did perfectly right, in handing it to me to keep."

"Why?"

"Well, if for no other reason than because it behaves so differently with me, than it did with him."

She referred, of course, to the very odd relationship of temperature to sex, which the stone reveals. When I, a man, place my skin in contact with the gem, there is an unmistakably cold feeling. But when any woman touches the stone, the feeling is just as distinctly *warm*.

"Hobart, I am inclined to think that this fact is very significant. If Chick had only known of it, he wouldn't have insisted that Harry should wear it; and then—"

"Can't be helped," I interrupted quickly. "Chick didn't know; he was only certain that some one—*some one*—must wear the ring; that it must not pass out of the possession of humans. Moreover, much as Rhamda Avec may desire it—and the Nervina, too—neither can secure it through the use of force. Nobody knows why."

Charlotte shivered. "I'm afraid there's something spooky about it, after all."

"Nothing the sort," with a conviction that has never left me. "This ring is a perfectly sound fact, as indisputable as the submarine. There's nothing supernatural about it; for that matter, I personally doubt if there's *anything* supernatural. Every phenomenon which seems, at first, so wonderful, becomes commonplace enough as soon as explained. Isn't it true that you yourself are already getting used to that ring?"

"Ye-es," reluctantly. "That is, partly. If only it was some one other than Harry!"

"Of course," I hurried to say, "I only wanted to make it clear that we haven't any witchcraft to deal with. This whole mystery will become plain as day, and that darned soon!"

"You've got a theory?"—hopefully.

"Several; that's the trouble!" I had to admit. "I don't know which is best to follow out.

"It may be a spiritualistic thing after all. Or it may fall under the head of 'abnormal pyschology.' Nothing but hallucinations, in other words."

"Oh, that won't do!" — evidently distressed. "I know what I saw! I'd doubt my reason if I thought I'd only fancied it!"

"So would I. Well, laying aside the spiritualistic theory, there remains the possibility of some hitherto undiscovered scientific secret. And if the Rhamda is in possession of it, then the matter simmers down to a plain case of villainy."

"But how does he do it?"

"That's the whole question. However, I'm sure of this"—I was fingering the ring as I spoke. The reproduction of our friends had faded, now, leaving that dully glowing pale blue light once more. "This ring is absolutely real; it's no hallucination. It performs as well in broad daylight as in the night; no special conditions needed. It's neither a fraud nor an illusion.

"In short, sis, this ring is merely a phenomenon which science has not *yet* explained! That it can and will be explained is strictly up to us!"

I referred again to Harry's notes. In them he tells of having taken the ring to a jeweler, also to a chemist; and of having discovered still another singular thing. This, as the reader will recall, is the gem's anomalous property of combining perfect solidity with extreme lightness. Although as hard and as rigid as any stone, it is so extraordinarily light that it is buoyant in air. A solid, lighter than air.

"Sis, I felt like prophesying, "this stone will prove the key to the whole mystery! Remember how desperately anxious the Rhamda has been to get hold of it?"

"Once we understand these peculiar properties, we can mighty soon rescue Harry!"

"And Mr Watson, reminded Charlotte. She had never met Bertha Holcomb, to whom Chick had been engaged, but she sympathized very deeply with the heart-broken daughter of the old professor. It was she who had given Chick the ring. "It has taken away both her father and her sweetheart!"

And it was just then, as I started to make reply, that a most extraordinary thing occurred. It happened so very unexpectedly, so utterly without warning, that it makes me shaky to this day whenever I recall the thing.

From the gem on Charlotte's finger—or rather, from the air surrounding the ring—came an unmistakable sound. We saw nothing whatever, we only heard. And it was as clear, as loud and as startling as though it had occurred right in the room where we were discussing the situation.

It was the sharp, joyous bark of a dog.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOUSE OF MIRACLES

LOOKING back over what has just been written, I am sensible of a profound gratitude. I am grateful, both because I have been given the privilege of relating these events, and because I shall not have to leave this wilderness of facts for someone else to explain.

Really, if I did not know that I shall have the pleasure of piecing together these phenomena and of setting my finger upon the comparatively simple explanation; if I had to go away and leave this account unfinished, a mere collection of curiosity-provoking mysteries, I should not speak at all. I should leave the whole affair for another to finish, as it ought to be finished.

All of which, it will soon appear, I am setting forth largely in order to brace and strengthen myself against what I must now relate.

Before resuming, however, I should mention one detail which Harry was too modest to mention. He was—or is—unusually good-looking. I don't mean to claim that he possessed any Greek-god beauty; such wouldn't gibe with a height of five foot seven. No; his good looks was due to the simple outward expression, through his features, of a certain noble inward quality which would have made the homeliest face attractive. Selfishness will spoil the handsomest features; unselfishness will glorify.

Moreover, simply because he had given his word to Chick Watson, that he would wear the ring, Harry took upon himself the most dangerous task that any man could assume, and he had lost. But had he known in advance exactly what was going to happen to him, he would have stuck to his word, anyhow. And since there was a sporting risk attached to it, since the thing was not perfectly sure to end tragically, he probably enjoyed the greater part of his experience.

But I'm not like that. Frankly, I'm an opportunist; essentially, a practical sort of fellow. I have a great admiration for idealists, but a much greater admiration for results. For instance, I have seldom given my word, even though the matter is unimportant; for I will cheerfully break my word if, later on, it should develop that the keeping of my word would do more harm than good.

I realize perfectly well that this is dangerous ground to tread upon; yet I must refer the reader to what I have accomplished in this world, as proof that my philosophy is not as bad as it looks.

I beg nobody's pardon for talking about myself so much at the outset. This account will be utterly incomprehensible if I am not understood. My method of solving the Blind Spot mystery is, when analyzed, merely the expression of my personality. My sole idea has been to get *results*.

As Harry has put it, a proposition must be reduced to concrete form before I will have anything to do with it. If the Blind Spot had been a totally occult affair, demanding that the investigation be conducted under cover of darkness, surrounded by black velvet, crystal spheres and incense; demanding the aid of a clairvoyant or other "medium" I should never have gone near it. But as soon as the mystery began to manifest itself in terms that I could understand, appreciate and measure, then I took interest.

That is why old professor Holcomb appealed to me; he had proposed that we prove the occult by physical means. "Reduce it to the scope of our five senses," he had said, in effect. From that moment on I was his disciple.

I have told of hearing that sharp, welcoming bark, emitted either from the gem or from the air surrounding it. This event took place on the front porch of the house at 288 Chatterton, as Charlotte and I sat there talking it all over. We had taken a suite at the hotel, but had come to the house of the Blind Spot in order to decide upon a course of action. And, in a way, that mysterious barking decided it for us.

We returned to the hotel, and gave notice that we would leave the next day. Next, we began to make preparations for moving at once into the Chatterton Place dwelling.

That afternoon, while in the midst of giving orders for furnishings and the like, there at the hotel, I was called to the telephone. It was from a point outside the building.

"Mr. Fenton?"—in a man's voice. And when I had assured him; "You have no reason to recognize my voice. I am—Rhamda Avec."

"The Rhamda! What do you want?"

"To speak with your sister, Mr. Fenton. Odd how very agreeable the man's tones! "Will you kindly call her to the telephone?"

I saw no objection. However, when Charlotte came to my side I whispered for her to keep the man waiting while I darted out into the corridor and slipped downstairs, where the girl at the switchboard put an instrument into the circuit for me. Money talks. However—

"MY DEAR child," the voice of Avec was saying, "you do me an injustice. I have nothing but your welfare at heart. I assure you, that if anything should happen to you and your brother while at 288 Chatterton, it will be through no fault of mine.

"At the same time, I can positively assure you that, if you stay away from there, no harm will come to either of you; absolutely none! I can guarantee that. Don't ask me why; but, if you value your safety, stay where you are, or go elsewhere, anywhere other than to the house in Chatterton Place."

"I can hardly agree with you, Mr. Avec. Plainly Charlotte was deeply impressed with the man's sincerity and earnestness. "My brother's judgment is so much better than mine, that I—" and she paused regretfully.

"I only wish, with his remarkable gracefulness, "that your intuition were as strong as your loyalty to your brother. If it were, you would know that I speak the truth when I say that I have only your welfare at heart."

"I—I am sorry, Mr. Avec."

"Fortunately, there is one alternative," even more agreeable than before. "If you prefer not to take my advice, but cling to your brother's decision, you can still avoid the consequences of his determination to live in that house. As I say, I cannot prevent harm from befalling you, under present conditions; but these conditions can be completely altered if you will make a single concession, Miss Fenton."

"What is it?" eagerly.

"That you give me that ring!"

He paused for a very tense second. I wished I could see his peculiar, young-old face—the face with the inscrutable eyes; with their expression of youth combined with the wisdom of the ages; the face that urged, rather than inspired, both curiosity and confidence. Then he added:

"I know why you wear it; I realize that the trinket carries some very tender associations. And I would never ask such a concession did I not know, were your beloved here at this moment, he would endorse every word that I say; and—"

"Harry!" cried Charlotte, her voice shaking. "He would tell me to give it to you?"

"I am sure of it! It is as though he, through me, were urging you to do this!"

For some moments there was silence. Charlotte must have been tremendously impressed. It certainly was amazing the degree of confidence that Avec's voice induced. I wouldn't have been greatly surprised had my sister—

It occurred to me that, if the man wanted the gem so badly, it was queer that he had not attempted to get it by forceful means. Remember how weak Chick Watson was that night in the café, and how easily the Rhamda could have taken the ring away from him.

Moreover, he had never attempted to force Harry to part with it, in that struggle of ours his only aim had been to throw Harry and me into that fatal room, before the closing of the Spot. Only the ringing of the bell saved us. Why didn't he employ violence to get the ring? Was it possible that we were misjudging him, after all; and that, instead of being the scoundrel that we thought him to be—

"Mr. Avec, came Charlotte's voice, hesitatingly, almost sorrowfully. "I — I would like to believe you; but—but Harry himself gave me the ring, and I feel—oh, I'm sure that my brother would never agree to it!"

"I understand." Somehow the fellow managed to conceal any disappointment he may have felt. He contrived to show only a deep sympathy for Charlotte, as he finished: "If I find it possible to protect you, I shall, Miss Fenton."

After it was all over, and I returned to the rooms, Charlotte and I concluded that it might have been better had we made some sort of compromise. If we had made a partial concession, he might have told us something of the mystery. We ought to have bargained. We decided that if he made any attempt to carry out what I felt sure was merely a thinly veiled threat to punish us for keeping the gem, we must not only be ready for whatever he might do, but try to trap and keep him as well.

That same day found us back at 288 Chatterton. Harry has already mentioned the place in detail. And I can't blame him for feeling more or less uneasiness when, at various times, he approached the house. Very likely it was because the house needed painting. Any once-handsome residence, when allowed to fall into disrepair, will readily suggest all sorts of spooky things.

Inside, there was altogether too much evidence that the place had been bachelors' quarters. It will be recalled that both Harry and Jerome, the detective, lived there for a year after Chick's previous residence.

The first step was to clean up. We hired lots of help, and made a quick, thorough job of both floors. The basement we left untouched. And the next day we put a force of painters and decorators to work; whereby hangs the tale.

"Mr. Fenton," called the boss painter, as he varnished the "trim" in the parlor, "I wish you'd come and see what to make of this."

I stepped into the front room. He was pointing to the long piece of finish which spanned the doorway leading into the dining-room. And he indicated a spot almost in the exact middle, a spot covering a space about five inches broad and as high as the width of the wood. In outline it was roughly octagonal.

"I've been trying my best," stated Johnson, "to varnish that spot for the past five minutes. But I'll be darned if I can do it!"

And he showed what he meant. Every other part of the door-frame glistened with freshly applied varnish; but the octagonal region remained dull, as though no liquid had ever touched it. Johnson dipped his brush into the can, and applied a liberal smear of the fluid to the place. Instantly the stuff disappeared.

"Blamed porous piece of wood," eyeing me queerly "Or—do you think it's merely porous, Mr. Fenton?"

For answer I took a brush and repeatedly daubed the place. It was like dropping ink on a blotter. The wood sucked up the varnish as a desert might suck up water.

"There's about a quart of varnish in the wood already, observed Johnson, as I stared and pondered. "Suppose we take it down and weigh it?"

INSIDE of a minute we had that piece of trim down from its place. First, I carefully examined the timber framework behind, expecting to see traces of the varnish where, presumably, it had seeped through. There was no sign. Then I inspected the reverse side of the finish, just back of the peculiar spot. I thought I might see a region of wide open pores in the grain of the pine. But the back looked exactly the same as the front, with no difference in the grain at any place.

Placing the finish right side up, I proceeded to daub the spot some more. There was no change in the results. At last I took the can, and without stopping, poured a quart and a half of the fluid into that paradoxical little area.

"Well, I'll be darned!" — very loudly from Johnson. But when I looked up I saw that his face was white, and his lips shaking.

His nerves were all a-jangle. To give his mind a rest, I sent him for a hatchet. When he came back his face had regained its color. I directed him to hold the pine upright, while I, with a single stroke, sank the tool into the end of the wood

It split part way. A jerk, and he wood fell in two halves.

"Well?" from Johnson, blankly.

"Perfectly normal wood, apparently." I had to admit that it was impossible to distinguish the material which constituted that peculiar spot, from that which surrounded it.

I sent Johnson after more varnish. Also, I secured several other fluids, including water, milk, ink, and machine-oil. And when the painter returned we proceeded with a very thorough test indeed.

Presently it became clear that we were dealing with a phenomenon of the Blind Spot. All told, we poured about nine pints of liquids into an area of about twenty square inches; all on the outer surface, for the split side would absorb nothing. And to all appearances we might have continued to pour indefinitely.

Ten minutes later I went down into the basement to dispose of some rubbish. (Charlotte didn't know of this defection in our housekeeping.) It was bright sunlight outside. Thanks to the basement windows, I needed no artificial luminant. And when my gaze rested upon the ground directly under the parlor, I saw something there that I most certainly had never noticed before.

The fact is, the basement at 288 Chatterton never did possess anything worthy of special notice. Except for the partition which, it will be remembered, Harry Wendel and Jerome, the detective, were the first in years to penetrate—except for that secret doorway, there was nothing down there to attract attention. To be sure, there was a quantity of up-turned earth, the result of Jerome's vigorous efforts to see whether or not there was any connection between the Blind Spot phenomena which he had witnessed and the cellar. He had secured nothing but an appetite for all his digging.

However, it was still too dark for me to identify what I saw at once. I stood for a few moments, accustoming my eyes to the light. Except that the thing gleamed oddly like a piece of glass, and that it possessed a nearly circular outline about two feet across, I could not tell much about it.

Then I stooped and examined it closely.

At once I became conscious of an odor which, somehow, I had hitherto not noticed. Small wonder; it was as indescribable a smell as one could imagine. It seemed to be a combination of several that are not generally combined.

Next instant it flashed upon me that the predominating odor was a familiar one. I had been smelling it, in fact, all morning.

But this did not prevent me from feeling very queer, indeed, as I realized what lay before me. A curious chill passed around my shoulders, and I scarcely breathed.

At my feet lay a pool, composed of all the various liquids that had been poured, up-stairs, into that baffling spot in the wood.

CHAPTER XXI

OUT OF THIN AIR

EXCEPT for the incident just related, when several pints of very real fluids were somehow "materialized" at a spot ten feet below where they had vanished, nothing worth recording occurred during the first seven days of our stay at 288 Chatterton.

Seemingly nothing was to come of the Rhamda's warning.

On the other hand we succeeded, during that week, in working a complete transformation of the old house. It became one of the brightest spots in San Francisco. It cost a good deal of money, all told, but I could well afford it, having recently received my fee for the work in the Andes. I possessed the hundred thousand with which, I had promised myself and Harry, I should solve the Blind Spot. That was what the money was for.

On the seventh day after the night of Harry's going, our household was increased to three members. For it was then that Jerome, who was the last person to see Dr. Holcomb before his disappearance, and who stayed in that house with Chick Watson and also with Harry—returned from Nevada, whence he had gone two weeks before on a case.

"Not at all surprised," commented he, when I told him of Harry's disappearance. "Sorry I wasn't here.

"That crook, Rhamda Avec, in at the end?"

He gnawed stolidly at his cigar as I told him the story. He said nothing until he had heard the whole story; then, after briefly approving what I had done to brighten the house, he announced:

"Tell you what. I've got a little money out of that Nevada case: I'm going to take another vacation and see this thing through.

We shook hands on this, and he moved right into his old room. I felt, in fact, mighty glad to have Jerome with us. Although he lacked a regular academic training, he was fifteen years my senior, and because of contact with a wide variety of people in his work, both well-informed and reserved in his judgment. He could not be stampeded; he had courage; and, above everything else, he had the burning curiosity of which Harry has written.

I was up-stairs when he unpacked. And I noted among his belongings a large, rather heavy automatic pistol. He nodded when I asked if he was willing to use it in this case.

"Although"—unbuttoning his vest—"I don't pin as much faith to pistols as I used to.

"The Rhamda is, I'm convinced, the very cleverest proposition that ever lived. He has means to handle practically anything in the way of resistance." Jerome knew how the fellow had worsted Harry and me. "I shouldn't wonder if he can read the mind to some extent; he might be able to foresee that I was going to draw a gun, and beat me to it with some new weapon of his own."

Having unbuttoned his vest, Jerome then carefully displayed a curious contrivance mounted upon his breast. It consisted of a broad metal plate, strapped across his shirt, and affixed to this plate was a flat-springed arrangement for firing, simultaneously, the contents of a revolver cylinder. To show how it worked, Jerome re-

moved the five cartridges and then faced me.

"Tell me to throw up my hands," directed he. I did so; his palms flew into the air; and with a steely snap the mechanism was released.

Had there been cartridges in it, I should have been riddled, for I stood right in front. And I shuddered as I noted the small straps around Jerome's wrists, running up his sleeves, so disposed that the act of surrendering meant instant death to him who might demand.

"May not be ethical, Fenton"—quietly—"but it certainly is good sense to shoot first and explain later—when you're handling a chap like Avec. Better make preparations, too."

I objected. I pointed out what I have already mentioned; that, together with the ring, the Rhamda offered our only clues to the Blind Spot. Destroy the man, and we would destroy one of our two hopes of rescuing our friends from the unthinkable fate that had overtaken them.

"No"—decisively. "We don't want to kill; we want to *keep* him. Bullets won't do. I see no reason, however, why you shouldn't load that thing with cartridges containing chemicals which would have an effect similar to that of a gas bomb. Once you can make him helpless, so that you can put those steel bracelets on him, we'll see how dangerous he is, with his hands behind him!"

"I get you"—thoughtfully. "I know a chemist who will make up 'Paralysis' gas for me, in the form of gelatin capsules. Shoot 'em at the Rhamda; burst upon striking. Safe enough for me, and yet put him out of the business long enough to fit him with the jewelry."

"That's the idea."

BUT I had other notions about handling the Rhamda. Being satisfied that mere strength and agility were valueless against him, I concluded that he, likewise realizing this, would be on the lookout for any possible trap.

Consequently, if I hoped to keep the man, and force him to tell us what we wanted to know, then I must make use of something other than physical means. Moreover, I gave him credit for an exceptional amount of insight. Call it a super-instinct, or what you will, the fellow's intellect was transcendental.

I could not hope for success unless I equalled his intellect, or surpassed it.

Once decided that it must be a battle of wits I took a step which may seem, at first, a little peculiar.

I called upon a certain lady to whom I shall give the name of Clarke, since that is not the correct one. I took her fully and frankly into my confidence. It is the only way, when dealing with a practitioner. And since, like most of my fellow citizens, she had heard something of the come and go, elusive habits of our men, together with the Holcomb affair, it was easy for her to understand just what I wanted.

"I see," she mused. "You wish to be surrounded by an influence that will not so much protect you, as vitalize and strengthen you whenever you come in contact with Avec. It will be a simple matter. How far do you wish to go?" And thus it was arranged, the plan calling for the cooperation of some twenty of her colleagues.

My fellow engineers may sneer, if they like. I know the usual notion: that the "power of mind over matter" is all in the brain of the patient. That the efforts of the practitioner are merely inductive, and so on.

But I think that the most skeptical will agree that I did quite right in seeking whatever support I could get before crossing swords with a man as keen as Avec.

Nevertheless, before an opportunity arrived to make use of the intellectual machinery which my money had started into operation, something occurred which almost threw the whole thing out of gear.

It was the evening after I had returned from Miss Clarke's office; the same day Jerome returned, the fifth after the Spot had closed upon Harry. Both Charlotte and I had a premonition, after supper, that things were going to happen. We all went

into the parlor, sat down, and waited.

Presently we started the victrola. Jerome sat nearest the instrument, where he could, without rising, lean over and change the records. And all three of us recall that the selection being played at the moment was "I Am Climbing Mountains," a sentimental little melody sung by a popular tenor. Certainly the piece was far from being melancholy, mysterious, or otherwise likely to attract the occult.

I remember that we played it twice, and it was just as the singer reached the beginning of the final chorus that Charlotte, who sat nearest the door, made a quick move and shivered, as though with cold.

From where I sat, near the dining-room door, I could see through into the hall. Charlotte's action made me think that the door might have become unlatched, allowing a draft to come through. Afterward she said that she had felt something rather like a breeze pass her chair.

In the middle of the room stood a long, massive table, of conventional library type. Overhead was a heavy, burnished copper fixture, from which a cluster of electric bulbs threw their brilliance upward, so that the room was evenly lighted with the diffused rays as reflected from the ceiling. Thus, there were no shadows to confuse the problem.

The chorus of the song was almost through when I heard, from the direction of the table, a faint sound, as though someone had drawn fingers lightly across the polished oak. I listened; the sound was not repeated, at least not loud enough for me to catch it above the music. Next moment, however, the record came to an end; Jerome leaned forward to put on another, and Charlotte opened her mouth as though to suggest what the new selection might be. But she never said the words.

It began with a scintillating iridescence, up on the ceiling, not eight feet from where I sat. As I looked the spot grew, and spread, and flared out. It was blue, like the elusive blue of the gem; only, it was more like flame — the flame of electrical apparata.

Then, down from that blinding radiance there crept, rather than dropped, a single thread of incandescence, vivid, with only a tinge of color from which it had surged. Down it crept to the floor; it was like an irregular streak of lightning, hanging motionless between ceiling and floor, just for the fraction of a second. All in total silence.

And then the radiance vanished, disappeared, snuffed out as one might snuff out a candle. And in its stead—

There appeared a fourth person in the room.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ROUSING OF A MIND

IT WAS a girl; not the Nervina, that woman who had so mysteriously entered Harry Wendel's life, and who had vanished from this earth at the same time as he. No; this girl was quite another person.

Even now I find it curiously hard to describe her. For me to say that she was the picture of innocence, of purity, and of dainty yet vigorous youth, is still to leave unsaid the secret of her loveliness.

For this stranger, coming out of the thin air into our midst, held me with a glorious fascination. From the first I felt no misgivings, such as Harry confesses that he experienced when he fell under the Nervina's charm. I knew as I watched the stranger's wondering, puzzled features, that I had never before seen any one so lovely, so attractive, and so utterly beyond suspicion.

It was only later that I noted her amazingly delicate complexion, fair as her hair was golden; her deep blue eyes, round face, and girlish, supple figure; or her robe-like garments of soft, white material. For she began almost instantly to talk.

But we understood only with the greatest of difficulty. She spoke as might one who, if living in perfect solitude for a score of years, might suddenly be called upon to use language. And I remembered that Rhamda Avec had told Jerome that he had only *begun* the use of language.

"Who are you?" was her first remark, in the sweetest voice conceivable. But there was both fear and anxiety in her manner. "How—did I—get—here?"

"You came out of the Blind Spot!" I spoke, jerking out the words nervously, and, as I saw, too rapidly. I repeated them more slowly. But she did not comprehend.

"The — Blind — Spot," she pondered. "What—is that?"

Next instant, before I could think to warn her, the room trembled with the terrific clang of the Blind Spot bell. Just one overwhelming peal; no more. At the same time there came a revival of the luminous spot in the ceiling. But, with the last tones of the bell, the spot faded to nothing.

The girl was pitifully frightened. I sprang to my feet and steadied her with one hand—something that I had not dared to do as long as the Spot remained open. The touch of my fingers, as she swayed, had the effect of bringing her to herself. She listened intelligently to what I said.

"The Blind Spot"—speaking with the utmost care—"is the name we have given to a certain mystery. It is always marked by the sound you have just heard; that bell always rings when the phenomenon is at an end."

"And—the—phenomenon," uttering the word with difficulty, "what is that?"

"You," I returned. "Up till now three human beings have disappeared into what we call the Blind Spot. You are the first to be seen coming out of it."

"Hobart," interrupted Charlotte, coming to my side. "Let me!"

I stepped back, and Charlotte quietly passed an arm around the girl's waist. Together they stepped over to Charlotte's chair; and I noted the odd way in which the newcomer walked, unsteadily, uncertainly, like a child taking its first steps. I glanced at Jerome, wondering if this tallied with what he recalled of the Rhamda; and he gave a short nod.

"Don't be frightened," said Charlotte softly, "we are your friends. In a way we have been expecting you, and we shall see to it that no harm comes to you.

"Which would you prefer—to ask questions, or to answer them?"

"I"—the girl hesitated — "I — hardly —know. Perhaps—you had—better—ask —something first."

"Good. Do you remember where you came from? Can you recall the events just prior to your arrival here?"

THE girl looked helplessly from the one to the other of us. She seemed to be searching for some clue. Finally she shook her head in a hopeless, despairing fashion.

"I can't remember," speaking with a shade less difficulty. "The—last thing—I recall is—seeing—you three—staring—at me."

This was a poser. To think, a person who, before our very eyes, had materialized out of the Blind Spot, was unable to tell us anything about it!

Still this lack of memory might be only a temporary condition, brought on by the special conditions under which she had emerged; an after-effect, as it were, of the semi-electrical phenomena. And it turned out that I was right.

"Then," suggested Charlotte, "suppose you ask us something."

The girl's eyes stopped roving and rested definitely, steadily, upon my own. And she spoke; still a little hesitantly:

"Who are you? What is your name?"

"Name?" taken wholly by surprise. "Ah —it is Hobart Fenton. "And"—automatically—"this is my sister Charlotte. The gentleman yonder is Mr. Jerome."

"I am glad to know you, Hobart," with perfect simplicity and apparent pleasure; "and you, Charlotte," passing an arm around my sister's neck; "and you—mister." Evidently she thought the title of "mister" to be Jerome's first name!

Then she went on to say, her eyes coming back to mine:

"Why do you look at me that way, Hobart?"

Just like that! I felt my cheeks go hot and cold by turns. For a moment I was helpless; then I made up my mind to be just as frank and candid as she.

"Because you're so good to look at!" I blurted out. "I never appreciated my eyesight as I do right now!"

"I am glad," she returned, simply and absolutely without a trace of confusion or resentment. "I know that I rather like to look at you—too."

Another stunned silence. And this time I didn't notice any change in the temperature of my face; I was to busily engaged in searching the depths of those warm blue eyes.

She did not blush, or even drop her eyes. She smiled, however, a gentle, tremulous smile that showed some deep feeling behind her unwavering gaze. And her breast heaved slightly.

I recovered myself with a start. Was I to take advantage of her ignorance? As things stood, the girl was as innocent and impressionable as an infant. I drew my chair up in front of her and took both her hands firmly in mine. Whereupon my resolution nearly deserted me. How warm, and soft, and altogether adorable they were. I drew a long breath and began:

"My dear miss—ah— By the way, what is your name?"

"I"—regretfully, after a moment's thought—"I don't know, Hobart.

"Quite so," as thought the fact was commonplace. "We will have to provide you a name. Any suggestions, sis?"

Charlotte hesitated only a second. "Let's call her Ariadne; it was Harry's mother's name.

"That's so; fine! Do you like the name —Ariadne?"

"Yes," both pleased and relieved. At the same time she looked oddly puzzled, and I could see her lips moving silently as she repeated the name to herself.

Not for an instant did I let go of those wonderful fingers. "What I want you to know, Ariadne, is that you have come into a world that is, perhaps, more or less like the one that you have just left. For all I know it is one and the same world, only, in some fashion not yet understood, you may have transported yourself to this place. Perhaps not.

"Now, we call this a room, a part of a house. Outside is a street. That street is one of hundreds in a vast city, which consists of a multitude of such houses, together with other and vastly larger structures. And these structures all rest upon a solid material, which we call the ground, or earth.

"The fact that you understand our language indicates that either you have fallen heir to a body and a brain which are thoroughly in tune with ours, or else — and please understand that we know very, very little of this mystery—or else your own body has somehow become translated into a condition which answers the same purpose.

"At any rate, you ought to comprehend what I mean by the term 'earth.' Do you?"

"Oh, yes," brightly. "I seem to understand everything you say, Hobart."

"Then there is a corresponding picture in your mind to each thought I have given you?"

"I think so," not so positively.

"Well," hoping that I could make it clear, "this earth is formed in a huge globe, part of which is covered by another material, which we term water. And the portions which are not so covered, and are capable of supporting the structures which constitute the city, we call by still another name. Can you supply that name?"

"Continents," without hesitation.

"Fine!" This was a starter anyhow. "We'll soon have your memory working, Ariadne!

"However, what I really began to say is this; each of these continents — and they are several in number—is inhabited by people more or less like ourselves. There is a vast number, all told. Each is either male or female, like ourselves—you seem to take this for granted, however—and you will find them all exceedingly interesting.

"Now, in all fairness," letting go her hands at last, "you must understand that there are, among the people whom you have yet to see, great numbers who are far more—well, attractive, than I am.

"And you must know," even taking my

gaze away, "that not all persons are as friendly as we. You will find some who are antagonistic to you, and likely to take advantage of—well, your unsophisticated viewpoint. In short"—desperately—"you must learn right away not to accept people without question; you must form the habit of reserving judgment, of waiting until you have more facts, before reaching an opinion of others.

"You must do this as a matter of self-protection, and in the interests of your greatest welfare." And I stopped.

SHE seemed to be thinking over what I had said. In the end she observed:

"This seems reasonable. I feel sure that wherever I came from such advice would have fit.

"However"—smiling at me in a manner to which I can give no name other than affectionate—"I have no doubts about you, Hobart. I know you are all right."

And before I could recover from the bliss into which her statement threw me, she turned to Charlotte with, "You too, Charlotte; I know I can trust you."

But when she looked at Jerome she commented: "I can trust you, mister, too; almost as much, but not quite. If you didn't suspect me, I could trust you completely."

Jerome went white. He spoke for the first time since the girl's coming.

"How—how did you know that I suspect you?"

"I can't explain; I don't know myself." Then, wistfully: "I wish you would quit suspecting me, mister. I have nothing to conceal from you."

"I know it!" Jerome burst out excitedly, apologetically. "I know it now! You're all right, little girl; I'm satisfied of that from now on!"

She sighed in pure pleasure. And she offered one hand to Jerome. He took it as though it were a humming-bird's egg, and turned almost purple. At the same time the honest, fervid manliness which backed the detective's professional nature shone through for the first time in my knowledge of him. From that moment his devotion to the girl was as absolute as that of the fondest father who ever lived.

Well, no need to detail all that was said during the next hour. Bit by bit we added to the girl's knowledge of the world into which she had emerged, and bit by bit there unfolded in her mind a corresponding image of the world from which she had come. With increasing readiness she supplied unexpressed thoughts. And when, for an experiment, we took her out on the front porch and showed her the stars, we were fairly amazed at the thoughts they aroused.

"Oh!" she cried, in sheer rapture. "I know what those are!" By now she was speaking fairly well. "They are stars!" Then: "They don't look the same. They're not outlined the same as what I know. But they can't be anything else!"

Not outlined the same. I took this to be a very significant fact. What did it mean?

"Look"—showing her the constellation Leo, on the ecliptic, and therefore visible to both the northern and southern hemispheres— "do you recognize that?"

"Yes," decisively. "That is, the arrangement; but not the appearance of the separate stars."

And we found this to be true of the entire sky. Nothing was entirely familiar to her; yet, she assured us, the stars could be nothing else. Her previous knowledge told her this, without explaining why, and without a hint as to the reason for the dissimilarity.

"Is it possible," said I, speaking half to myself, "that she has come from another planet?"

For we know that the sky, as seen from any of the eight planets in this solar system, would present practically the same appearance; but if viewed from a planet belonging to any other star-sun, the constellations would be more or less altered in their arrangement, because of the vast distances involved. As for the difference in the appearance of the individual stars, that might be accounted for by a dissimilarity in the chemical make-up of the atmosphere.

"Ariadne, it may be you've come from another world!"

"No," seemingly quite conscious that she was contradicting me. For that matter there wasn't anything offensive about her kind of frankness. "No, Hobart. I feel too much at home to have come from any other world than this one."

Temporarily I was floored. How could she, so ignorant of other matters, feel so sure of this?

We went back into the house. As it happened, my eye struck first the victrola. And it seemed a good idea to test her knowledge with this device.

"Is this apparatus familiar to you?"

"No. What is it for?"

"Do you understand what is meant by the term 'music'?"

"Yes, with instant pleasure. "This is music. She proceeded, without the slightest self-consciousness, to sing in a sweet clear soprano, and treated us to the chorus of "I Am Climbing Mountains"!

"Good Heavens!" gasped Charlotte. "What can it mean?"

For a moment the explanation evaded me. Then I reasoned: "She must have a sub-conscious memory of what was being played just before she materialized.

And to prove this, I picked out an instrumental piece which we had not played all evening. It was the finale of the overture to "Faust"; a selection, by the way, which was a great favorite of Harry's, and is one of mine. Ariadne listened in silence to the end.

"I seem to have heard something like it before," she decided slowly. "The melody, not the—the instrumentation.

"But it reminds me of something that I like very much. Whereupon she began to sing for us. But this time her voice was stronger and more dramatic; and as for the composition—all I can say is it had a wild, fierce ring to it, like "Men of Harlech"; only the notes did not correspond to the chromatic scale. *She sang in an entirely new musical system.*

"By George!" when she had done. "Now we *have* got something! For the first time, folks, we've heard some genuine, unadulterated Blind Spot stuff!"

"You mean," from Charlotte, excitedly, "that she has finally recovered her memory?"

It was the girl herself who answered. She shot to her feet, and her face became transfigured with a wonderful joy. At the same time she blinked hurriedly, as though to shut off a sight that staggered her.

"Oh, I remember! I"—she almost sobbed in her delight— "it is all plain to me, now! I know who I am!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RIIAMDA AGAIN

I COULD have yelled for joy. We were about to learn something of the Blind Spot—something that might help us to save Harry, and Chick, and the professor!

Ariadne seemed to know that a great deal depended upon what she was about to tell us. She deliberately sat down, and rested her chin upon her hand, as though determining upon the best way of telling something very difficult to express.

As for Charlotte, Jerry, and myself, we managed somehow to restrain our curiosity enough to keep silence. But we could not help glancing more or less wonderingly at our visitor. Presently I realized this, and got up and walked quietly about, as though intent upon a problem of my own.

Which was true enough. I had come to a very startling conclusion—I, Hobart Fenton, had fallen in love!

What was more, this affection of the heart had come to me, a very strong man, just as an affection of the lungs is said to strike such men—all of a sudden and hard. One moment I had been a sturdy, independent soul, intent upon a scientific investigation, the only symptoms of sentimental potentialities being my perfectly normal love for my sister and for my old friend. Then, before my very eyes, I had been smitten thus!

And the worst part of it was, I found myself *enjoying* the sensation. It made not the slightest difference to me that I

had fallen in love with a girl who was only a step removed from a wraith. Mysteriously she had come to me; as mysteriously she might depart. I had even to know from what sort of country she had come!

But that made no difference. She was *here*, in the same house with me; I had held her hands; and I knew her to be very, very real indeed just then. And when I considered the possibility of her disappearing just as inexplicably as she had come—well, my face went cold, I admit. But at the same time I felt sure of this much—I should never love any other woman.

The thought left me sober. I paused in my pacing and looked at her. As though in answer to my gaze she glanced up and smiled so affectionately that it was all I could do to keep from leaping forward and taking her right into my arms.

I turned hastily, and to cover my confusion I began to hum a strain from the part of "Faust" to which I have referred. I hummed it through, and was beginning again, when I was startled to hear this from the girl: "Oh, then you are Hobart!"

I wheeled, to see her face filled with a wonderful light.

"Hobart," she repeated, as one might repeat the name of a very dear one. "That —that music you were humming! Why, I heard Harry Wendel humming that yesterday!"

I suppose we looked very stupid, the three of us, so dumfounded that we could do nothing but gape incredulously at that extraordinary creature and her equally extraordinary utterance. She immediately did her best to atone for her sensation.

"I'm not sure that I can make it clear," she said, smiling dubiously, "but if you will use your imaginations and try to fill in the gaps in what I say you may get a fair idea of the place I have come from, and where Harry is."

We leaned forward, intensely alert. I shall never forget the pitiful eagerness in poor Charlotte's face. It meant more to her, perhaps, than to any one else.

At that precise instant I heard a sound, off in the breakfast room. It seemed to be a subdued knocking, or rather a pounding at the door.

Frowning at the interruption, I stepped through the dining-room into the breakfast room, where the sounds came from. And I was not a little puzzled to note that the door to the basement was receiving the blows.

Now, I had been the last to visit the basement, and had locked the door—from force of habit, I suppose—leaving the key in the lock. It was still there. And there is but one way to enter that basement: through this one door, and no other.

"Who is it?" I called out peremptorily. No answer; only a repitition of the pounds.

"What do you want?"—louder.

"Open this door, quick!" came a muffled reply.

The voice was unrecognizable. I stood and thought quickly; then shouted:

"Wait a minute, until I get a key!"

I motioned to Charlotte. She tiptoed to my side. I whispered something in her ear; and she slipped off into the kitchen, there to phone Miss Clarke and warn her to notify her colleagues at once. And so, as I unlocked the door, I was fortified by the knowledge that I would be assisted by the combined mind-force of a score of highly developed intellects.

I was a little surprised, a second later, to see that the intruder was Rhamda Avec. What reason to expect any one else?

"How did you get down there?" I demanded. "Don't you realize that you are liable to arrest for trespass?"

I said it merely to start conversation. But it served only to bring a slight smile to the face of this professed friend of ours, for whom we felt nothing but distrust and fear.

"Let us not waste time in trivialities, Fenton," he rejoined gently. He brushed a fleck of cobweb from his coat. "By this time you ought to know that you cannot deal with me in any ordinary fashion."

I made no comment as, without asking my leave or awaiting an invitation, he

stepped through into the dinning-room and thence into the parlor. I followed, half tempted to strike him down from behind, but restrained more by the fact that I must spare him than from any compunctions. Seemingly he knew this as well as I he was serenely at ease.

And thus he stood before Jerome and Ariadne. The detective made a single sharp exclamation, and furtively shifted his coat sleeves. He was getting that infernal breast gun into action. As for Ariadne, she stared at the new arrival as though astonished, at first.

WHEN Charlotte returned, a moment later, she showed only mild surprise. She quietly took her chair and as quietly moved her hand so that the gem shone in full view of our visitor.

But he gave her and the stone only a single glance, and then rested his eyes upon our new friend. To my anxiety, Ariadne was gazing fixedly at him now, her expression combining both agitation and a vague fear

It could not have been due entirely to his unusual appearance; for there was no denying that this gray-haired yet youth-faced man with the distinguished, courteous bearing, looked even younger that night than ever before. No; the girl's concern was deeper, more acute. I felt an unaccountable alarm.

From Ariadne to me the Rhamda glanced, then back again; and a quick, satisfied smile came to his mouth. He gave an almost imperceptible nod. And, keeping his gazed fixed upon her eyes, he remarked carelessly:

"Which of these chairs shall I sit in, Fenton?"

"This one," I replied instantly, pointing to the one I had just quit.

Smiling, he selected a Roman chair a few feet away.

Whereupon I congratulated myself. The man feared me, then; yet he ranked my mentality no higher than that! In other words, remarkably clever though he might be, and as yet unthwarted, he could by no means be called omnipotent. He was limited; hence he was human, or something likewise imperfect, and likewise understandable if only my own mind might become—

"For your benefit, Mr. Jerome, let me say that I phoned Miss Fenton and her brother a few days ago, and urged them to give up their notion of occupying this house or of attempting to solve the mystery that you are already acquainted with. And I prophesied, Mr. Jerome, that their refusal to accept my advice would be followed by events that would justify me.

"They refused, as you know; and I am here to-night to make a final plea, so that they may escape the consequences of their wilfulness."

"You're a crook! And the more I see of you, Avec, the more easily I can understand why they turned you down!"

"So you, too, are prejudiced against me. regretted the man in the Roman chair "I cannot understand this. My motives are quite above question, I assure you.

Really!" I observed sarcastically. I stole a glance at Ariadne her eyes were still riveted, in a rapt yet half-fearful abstraction, upon the face of the Rhamda. It was time I took her attention away.

I called her name. She did not move her head, or reply. I said it louder: "Ariadne!"

"What is it, Hobart?" —very softly.

"Ariadne, this gentleman possesses a great deal of knowledge of the locality from which you came. We are interested in him, because we feel sure that, if he chose to, he could tell us something about our friends who—about Harry Wendel." Why not lay the cards plainly on the table? The Rhamda must be aware of it all, anyhow. "And as this man has said, he has tried to prevent us from solving the mystery. It occurs to me, Ariadne, that you might recognize this man. But apparently—"

She shook her head just perceptibly. I proceeded:

"He is pleased to call his warning a

prophesy; but we feel that a threat is a threat. What he really wants is that ring."

Ariadne had already, earlier in the hour, given the gem several curious glances. Now she stirred and sighed, and was about to turn her eyes from the Rhamda to the ring when he spoke again; this time in a voice as sharp as a steel blade:

"I do not enjoy being misunderstood, much less being misrepresented, Mr. Fenton. At the same time, since you have seen fit to brand me in such uncomplimentary terms, suppose I state what I have to say very bluntly, so that there may be no mistake about it. If you do not either quit this house, or give up the ring—*now*— you will surely regret it the rest of your lives!"

FROM the corner of my eye I saw Jerome moving slowly in his chair, so that he could face directly toward the Rhamda. His hands were ready for the swift, upward jerk which, I knew, would stifle our caller.

As for my sister, she merely turned the ring so that the gem no longer faced the Rhamda; and with the other hand she reached out and grasped Ariadne's firmly.

Avec sat with his two hands clasping the arms of that chair His fingers drummed nervously but lightly on the wood. And then, suddenly, they stopped their motion.

"Your answer, Fenton," in his usual gentle voice. "I can give you no more time."

I did not need to consult Charlotte or Jerome. I knew what they would have said.

"You are welcome to my answer. It is – no!"

As I spoke the last word my gaze was fixed on the Rhamda's eyes. He, on the other hand, was looking toward Ariadne. And at that very instant an expression, as of alarm and sorrow, swept into the man's face.

My glance jumped to Ariadne. Her eyes were closed, her face suffused, she seemed to be suffocating. She gave a queer little sound, half gasp and half cry.

Simultaneously Jerome's hands shot into the air. The room shivered with the stunning report of his breast gun. And every pellet struck the Rhamda and burst.

A look of intense astonishment came into his face. He gave Jerome a fleeting glance, almost of admiration; then his nostrils contracted with pain as the deadly gas attacked his lungs.

Another second, and each of us was reeling with the fumes. Jerome started toward the window, to raise it, then sank back into his chair. And when he turned around—

He and I and Charlotte saw an extraordinary thing. Instead of succumbing to the gas, Rhamda Avec somehow recovered himself. And while the rest of us remained still too numb to move or speak, he found power to do both.

"I warned you plainly, Fenton," as though nothing in particular had happened. "And now see what you have brought upon the poor child!"

I could only roll my head stupidly, to stare at Ariadne's now senseless form.

"As usual, Fenton, you will blame me for it. I cannot help that. But it may still be possible for you to repent of your folly and escape your fate. You are playing with terrible forces. If you do repent, just follow these instructions"—laying a card on the table—"and I will see what I can do for you. I wish you good night, every one."

And with that, pausing only to make a courtly bow to Charlotte, Rhamda Avec turned and walked deliberately, dignifiedly from the room, while two men and a woman stared helplessly after him and allowed him to go in peace.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LIVING DEATH

AS SOON as the fresh air had revived us somewhat, we first of all examined Ariadne. She still lay unconscious, very pale, and alarmingly limp. I picked her up and carried her into the next room, where there was a sofa, while Jerome went

for water and Charlotte brought smelling-salts.

Neither of these had any effect. Ariadne seemed to be scarcely breathing; her heart beat only faintly, and there was no response to such other methods as friction, slapping, or pinching of finger-nails.

"We had better call a doctor, decided Charlotte promptly, and went to the phone.

I picked up the card which the Rhamda had left. It contained simply his name, together with one other word—the name of a morning newspaper. Evidently he meant for us to insert an advertisement as soon as we were ready to capitulate.

"Not yet!" the three of us decided, after talking it over. And we waited as patiently as we could during the fifteen minutes that elapsed before the telephoning got results.

It brought Dr. Hansen, who, it may be remembered, was closely identified with the Chick Watson disappearance. He made a rapid but careful examination.

"It has all the appearance of a mild electrical shock. What caused it, Fenton?"

I told him. His eyes narrowed when I mentioned Avec, then widened in astonishment and incredulity as I related the man's inexplicable effect upon the girl, and his strange immunity to the poison gas. But the doctor asked nothing further about our situation, proceeding at once to apply several restoratives. All were without result. As a final resort, he even rigged up an electrical connection, making use of some coils which I had upstairs, and endeavored to arouse the girl in that fashion. Still without result.

"Good Lord, Hansen!" I finally burst out, when he stood back, apparently baffled. "She's simply *got* to be revived! We can't allow her to succumb to that scoundrel's power, whatever it is!"

"Why not a blood transfusion?" eagerly, as an idea came to me. "I'm in perfect condition. Go to it, doc!"

He slowly shook his head. And beyond a single searching glance into my eyes, wherein he must have read something more than I had said, he regretfully replied:

"This is a case for a specialist, Fenton. Everything considered, I should say that she is suffering from a purely mental condition; but whether it had a physical or a psychic origin, I can't say."

In short, he did not feel safe about going ahead with any really heroic measures until a brain specialist was called in.

I had a good deal of confidence in Hansen. And what he said sounded reasonable. So we agreed to his calling in a Dr. Higgins—the same man, in fact, who was too late in reaching the house to save Chick on that memorable night a year before.

His examination was swift and convincingly competent. He went over the same ground that Hansen had covered, took the blood pressure and other instrumental data, and asked us several questions regarding Ariadne's mentality as we knew it. Scarcely without stopping to think it over, Higgins decided:

"The young woman is suffering from a temporary disassociation of brain centers. Her cerebrum does not co-act with her cerebellum. In other words, her conscious mind, for lack of means to express itself, is for the time being dormant as in sleep.

"But it is not like ordinary sleep. Such is induced by fatigue of the nerve channels. This young woman's condition is produced by shock; and since there was no physical violence, we must conclude that the shock was psychic.

"In that case, the condition will last until one of two things occurs; either she must be similarly shocked back into sensibility—and I can't see how this can happen, Fenton, unless you can secure the cooperation of the man to whom you attribute the matter—or she must lie that way indefinitely."

"Indefinitely!" I exclaimed, sensing something ominous. "You mean—"

"That there is no known method of reviving a patient in such a condition. It might be called psychic catalepsy. To speak plainly, Fenton, unless this man revives her, she will remain unconscious until her death."

I shuddered. What horrible thing had come into our lives to afflict us with so dreadful a prospect?

"Is—is there no hope, Dr. Higgins?"

"Very little"—gently but decisively. All I can assure you is that she will not die immediately. From the general state of her health, she will live at least forty-eight hours. After that—brace yourself, man!—you must be prepared for the worst at any moment."

I turned away quickly so that he could not see my face. What an awful situation! Poor little girl, stricken in this fashion through my own stubbornness—how, I didn't know—but stricken like that! Unless we could somehow lay hands on the Rhamda—

I hunted up Jerome. I said:

"Jerry, the thing is plainly up to you and me. Higgins gives us two days. Day after tomorrow morning, if we haven't got results by that time, we've got to give in and put that ad in the paper. But I don't mean to give in, Jerry! Not until I've exhausted every other possibility!"

"What're you going to do?"—thoughtfully.

"Work on that ring. I was a fool not to get busy sooner That gem can probably tell me a part of the truth. As for the rest, that's up to you! You've got to get yourself on the Rhamda's trail as soon as you can, and camp there! The first chance you get, ransack his room and belongings, and bring me every bit of data you find. Between him and the ring, the truth ought to come out.

"All right. But don't forget that—pointing to the unexplained spot on the wood of the doorway. "You've got a mighty important clue there, waiting for you to analyze it."

And he went and got his hat, and left the house. His final remark was that we wouldn't see him back until he had something to report about our man.

FIVE O'CLOCK the next morning found my sister and me out of our beds and desperately busy. She spent a good deal of time, of course, in caring for Ariadne. The poor girl showed no improvement at all; and we got scant encouragement from the fact that she looked no worse. But she lay there, the fairlylike thing that she was, making me wonder if nature had ever intended such a treasure to become ill.

Not a sound escaped her lips; her eyes remained closed, she gave no sign of life, save her barely perceptible breathing and her other automatic functions. It made me sick at heart just to look at her; so near, and yet so fearfully far away.

But when Charlotte could spare any time she gave me considerable help in what I was trying to do. One great service she has rendered has already been made clear: she wore the ring constantly, thus relieving me of the anxiety of caring for it. I was mighty cautious not to have it in my possession more than a few minutes at a time.

My first move was to set down, in ordinary fashion, the list of the gem's attributes. I grouped together the fluctuating nature of its pale-blue color, its power of reproducing those who had gone into the Blind Spot, its combination of perfect solidity with extreme lightness; its quality of coldness to the touch of a male, and warmth to that of a female; and finally its ability to induct—I think this is the right term—to induct sounds out of the unknown. This last quality might be called spasmodic or accidental, whereas the others were permanent and constant.

Now, to this list I presently was able to add that the gem possessed no radioactive properties that I could detect with the usual means. It was only when I began dabbling in chemistry that I learned things.

By placing the gem inside a glass bell, and exhausting as much air as possible from around it, the way was cleared for introducing other forms of gases. Whereupon I discovered this:

The stone will absorb any given quantity of hydrogen gas.

It this respect it behaves analogously to that curious place on the door-frame.

Only, it absorbs gas, no liquid; and not any gas, either—none but hydrogen.

Now, obviously this gem cannot truly absorb so much material, in the sense of retaining it as well. The simple test of weighing it afterward proves this; for its weight remains the same under any circumstances.

Moreover, unlike the liquids which I poured into the wood and saw afterward in the basement, the gas does not afterward escape back into the air. I kept it under a bell long enough to be sure of that. No; that hydrogen is, manifestly, translated into the Blind Spot.

Learning nothing further about the gem at that time, I proceeded to investigate the trim of the door. I began by trying to find out the precise thickness of that liquid-absorbing layer.

To do this, I scraped off the "skin" of the air-darkened wood. This layer was .02 of an inch thick. And—that was the total amount of the active material!

I put these scrapings through a long list of experiments. They told me nothing valuable. I learned only one detail worth mentioning; if a fragment of the scrapings be brought near to the Holcomb gem—say, to within two inches—the scrapings will burst into flame. It is merely a bright, pinkish flare, like that made by smokeless rifle-powder. No ashes remain. After that we took care not to bring the ring near to the remaining material on the board.

All this occurred on the first day after Ariadne was stricken. Jerome phoned to say that he had engaged the services of a dozen private detectives, and expected to get wind of the Rhamda any hour. Both Dr. Hansen and Dr. Higgins called twice, without being able to detect any change for the better or otherwise in their patient.

That evening Charlotte and I concluded that we could not hold out any longer. We must give in to the Rhamda. I phoned for a messenger, and sent an advertisement to the newspaper which Avec had indicated.

The thing was done. We had capitulated. The next development would be another and triumphant call from the Rhamda, and this time we would have to give up the gem to him if we were to save Ariadne. The game was up.

But instead of taking the matter philosophically, I worried about it all night. I told myself again and again that I was foolish to think about something that couldn't be helped. Why not forget it, and go to sleep?

But somehow I couldn't. I lay wide awake till long past midnight, finding myself growing more and more nervous. At last, such was the tension of it all, I got up and dressed. It was then about one-thirty, and I stepped out on the street for a walk.

Half an hour later I returned, my lungs full of fresh air, hoping that I could now sleep. It was only a hope. Never have I felt wider awake than then.

Once more—about three—I took another stroll outside. I seemed absolutely tireless. Each time that I turned back I seemed to feel stronger than ever, more wakeful. Finally I dropped the idea altogether, went to the house, and left a note for Charlotte, then walked down to the waterfront and watched some ships taking advantage of the tide. Anything to pass the time.

And thus it happened that, about eight o'clock—breakfast time at 288 Chatterton—I returned to the house, and sat down at the table with Charlotte. First, however, I opened the morning paper, to read our little ad.

It was not there. It had not been printed.

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR

I DROPPED the paper in dismay. Charlotte looked up, startled, gave me a single look, and turned pale.

"What—what's the matter?" she stammered fearfully.

I showed her. Then I ran to the phone. In a few seconds. I was talking to the very man who had taken the note from the messenger the day before.

"Yes, I handed it in along with the rest

of the dope," he replied to my excited query. Then—"Wait a minute," said he; and a moment later added: "Say, by jinks, Mr. Fenton, I've made a mistake! Here's the darned ad on the counter; it must have slipped under the blotter."

I went back and told Charlotte. We stared at one another blankly. Why in the name of all that was baffling had our ad "slipped" under that blotter? And what were we to do?

This was the second day!

Well, we did what we could. We inserted the same notice in each of the three afternoon papers. There was still time for the Rhamda to act, if he saw it.

The hours dragged by. Never did time pass more slowly; and yet, I begrudged every one. So much for being absolutely helpless.

About ten o'clock that morning—that is to say, today; I am writing this the same evening—the front door bell rang. Charlotte answered and in a moment came back with a card. It read:

Sir Henry Hodges

I nearly upset the table in my excitement. I ran into the parlor like a boy going to a fire. Who wouldn't? Sir Henry Hodges! The English scientist about whom the whole world was talking! The most gifted investigator of the day; the most widely informed; of all men on the face of the globe, the best equipped, mentally, to explore the unknown! Without the slightest formality I grabbed his hand and shook it until he smiled at my enthusiasm.

"My dear Sir Henry," I told him, "I'm immensely glad to see you! The truth is, I've been hoping you'd be interested in our case; but I didn't have the nerve to bother you with it!"

"And I," he admitted in his quiet way, "have been longing to take a hand in it, ever since I first heard of Professor Holcomb's disappearance. Didn't like to offer myself; understood that the matter had been hushed up, and—"

"For the very simple reason," I explained, "that there was nothing to be gained by publicity. If we had given the public the facts, we would have been swamped with volunteers to help us. I didn't know whom to confide in, Sir Henry; couldn't make up my mind. I only knew that one such man as yourself was just what I needed.

He overlooked the compliment, and pulled the newspaper from his pocket. "Bought this from a boy in the Mission a few minutes ago. Saw your ad, and jumped to the conclusion that matters had reached an acute stage. Let me have the whole story, my boy, as briefly as you can."

He already knew the published details. Also, he seemed to be acquainted—in some manner which puzzled me—with much that had not been printed. I sketched the affair as quickly as I could, making it clear that we were face to face with a crisis. When I wound up saying that it was Dr. Higgins who gave Ariadne two days, ending about midnight, in which she might recover if we could secure Rhamda Avec, Sir Henry gave me such a sharp glance as the doctor had given me; only, the Englishman reached out and squeezed one of my hands in silence. Then he said kindly:

"I'm afraid you made a mistake, my boy, in not seeking some help. The game has reached a point where you cannot have too many brains on your side. Time, in short, for reenforcements!"

He heartily approved of my course in enlisting the aid of Miss Clarke and her colleagues. "That is the sort of thing you need! People with mentalities; plenty of intellectual force!" And he went on to make suggestions.

As a result, within an hour and a half our house was sheltering five more persons, to whom I should have to devote several chapters if I did full justice to their achievements. But I have space here only for a mention.

Miss Clarke has already been introduced. She was easily one of the ten most advanced practitioners in her line. And she had the advantage of a curiosity that was

interested in everything odd, even though she labeled it "non-existent." She said it helped her faith in the real truths to be conversant with the unreal.

Dr. Malloy was from the university, an out-and-out materialist, a psychologist who made life interesting for those who agreed with James. His investigations of abnormal psychology are world-acknowledged.

Mme. Le Fabre, we afterward learned, had come from Versailles especially to investigate the matter that was bothering us. Which is all that needs to be said of this internationally famous inquirer into mysteries. She possessed no mediumistic properties of her own, but was a stanch proponent of spiritism, believing firmly in immortality and the omnipotence of "translated" souls.

Professor Herold is most widely known as the inventor of certain apparata connected with wireless. But it goes without saying that, from Berlin to Brazil, Herold is considered the West's most advanced student of electrical and radioactive subjects.

I was enormously glad to have this man's expert, high-tension knowledge right on tap.

The remaining member of the quintette which Sir Henry advised me to summon requires a little explanation. Also, I am obliged to give him a name not his own; for it is not often that brigadier-generals of the United States army can openly lend their names to anything so far removed, apparently, from militarism as the searching of the occult.

Yet we knew that this man possessed a power that few scientists have developed; the power of coordination, of handling and balancing great facts and forces, and of deciding promptly how best to meet any given situation. Not that we looked for anything militaristic out of the Blind Spot; far from it. We merely knew not what to expect, which was exactly why we wanted to have him with us; his type of mind is, perhaps, the most solidly comforting sort that any mystery-bound person can have at his side.

BY THE time these five had gathered, Jerome had neither returned nor telephoned. There was not the slightest trace of Rhamda Avec; no guessing as to whether he had seen the ad. It was then one o'clock in the afternoon. Only six hours ago! It doesn't seem possible.

So there were eight of us—three women and five men—who went up-stairs and quietly inspected the all but lifeless form of Ariadne and afterward gathered in the library below.

All were thoroughly familiar with the situation. Miss Clarke calmly commented to the effect that the entire Blind Spot affair was due wholly and simply to the cumulative effects of so many, many mistaken beliefs on such subjects; the result, in other words, of error.

Dr. Malloy was equally outspoken in his announcement that he proposed to deal with the matter from the standpoint of psychic aberration. He mentioned disassociated personalities, group hypnosis, and so on. But he declared that he was open to conviction, and anxious to get any and all facts.

Sir Henry had a good deal of difficulty in getting Mme. Le Fabre to commit herself. Probably she felt that, since Sir Henry had gone on record as being doubtful of the spiritistic explanation of psychic phenomena, she might start a controversy with him. But in the end she stated that she expected to find our little mystery simply a novel variation upon what was so familiar to her.

As might be supposed, General Hume had no opinion. He merely expressed himself as being prepared to accept any sound theory, or portions of such theories as might be advanced, and arrive at a workable conclusion therefrom. Which was exactly what we wanted of him. "I know it" —calmly.

Of them all, Professor Herold showed the most enthusiasm. Perhaps this was because, despite his attainments, he is still young. At any rate, he made it clear that he was fully prepared to learn something entirely new in science. And he was almost

eager to adjust his previous notions and facts to the new discoveries.

When all these various viewpoints had been cleared up, and we felt that we understood each other, it was inevitable that we should look to Sir Henry to state his position. This one man combined a large amount of the various, specialized abilities for which the others were noted, and they all knew and respected him accordingly. Had he stood and theorized half the afternoon, they would willingly have sat and listened. But instead he glanced at his watch, and observed:

"To me, the most important development of all was hearing the sound of a dog's bark coming from the ring. As I recall the details, the sound was emitted just after the gem had been submitted to considerable handling, from Miss Fenton's fingers to her brother's and back again. In other words, it was subjected to a mixture of opposing animal magnetisms. Suppose we experiment further with it now.

Charlotte slipped the gem from her finger and passed it around. Each of us held it for a second or two; after which Charlotte clasped the ring tightly in her palm, while we all joined hands.

It was, as I have said, broad daylight; the hour, shortly after one. Scarcely had our hands completed the circuit than something happened.

From out of Charlotte's closed hand there issued an entirely new sound. At first it was so faint and fragmentary that only two of us heard it. Then it became stronger and more continuous, and presently we were all gazing at each other in wonderment.

For the sound was that of footsteps.

CHAPTER XXVI

DIRECT FROM PARADISE

THE sound was not like that of the walking of a human. Nor was it such as an animal would make. It was neither a thud nor a pattering, but more like a scratching shuffle, such as reminded me of nothing that I had ever heard before.

Next moment, however, there came another sort of sound, plainly audible above the footsteps. This was a thin, musical chuckle which ended in a deep, but faint, organlike throb It happened only once.

Immediately it was followed by a steady clicking, such as might be made by gently striking a stick against the pavement; only sharper. This lasted a minute, during which the other sounds ceased.

Once more the footsteps. They were not very loud, but in the stillness of that room they all but resounded.

Presently Charlotte could stand it no longer. She placed the ring on the table, where it continued to emit those unplaceable sounds.

"Well! Do—do you people," stammered Dr. Malloy, "do you people all hear *that?*"

Miss Clarke's face was rather pale. But her mouth was firm. "It is nothing," said she, with theosophical positiveness. "You must not believe it—it is not the truth of—

"Pardon me, interrupted Sir Henry, "but this isn't something to argue about! It is a reality; and the sooner we all admit it, the better. There is a living creature of some kind making that sound!"

It is the spirit of some two-footed creature, asserted the *madame,* plainly at her ease. She was on familiar ground now. "If we only had a medium!"

Abruptly the sounds left the vicinity of the ring. At first we could not locate their new position. Then Herold declared that they came from under the table; and presently we were all gathered on the floor around the place, listening to those odd little sounds; while the ring remained thirty inches above, on the top of the table!

It may be that the thing, whatever it was, did not care for such a crowd. For shortly the shuffling ceased. And for a while we stared and listened, scarcely breathing, trying to locate the new position.

Finally we went back to our chairs. We had heard nothing further. Nevertheless, we continued to keep silence, with our ears alert for anything more.

"Hush!" whispered Charlotte all of a sudden. "Did you hear that?" And she looked up toward the ceiling.

In a moment I caught the sound. It was exceedingly faint, like the distant thrumming of a zither. Only it was a single note, which did not rise and fall, although there seemed a continual variation in its volume.

Unexpectedly the other sounds came again, down under the table. This time we remained in our seats and simply listened. And presently Sir Henry, referring to the ring, made this suggestion:

"Suppose we seal it up, and see whether it inducts the sound then as well as when exposed."

This appealed to Herold very strongly; the others were agreeable; so I ran up-stairs to my room and secured a small screw-top metal canister, which I knew to be air-tight. It was necessary to remove the stone from the ring, in order to get it into the opening in the can. Presently this was done; and while our invisible visitor continued its scratchy little walking as before, I screwed the top of the can down as tightly as I could.

Instantly the footsteps halted.

I unscrewed the top a trifle. As instantly the stepping was resumed.

"Ah!" cried Herold. "It's a question of radio-activity, then! Remember Le Bon's experiments, Sir Henry?"

"Right-o," returned the Englishman coolly.

But Miss Clarke was sorely mystified by this simple matter, and herself repeated the experiments. Equally puzzled was Mme. Le Fabre. According to her theory, a spirit wouldn't mind a little thing like a metal box. Of them all, Dr. Malloy was the least disturbed; so decidedly so that General Hume eyed him quizzically.

"Fine bunch of hallucinations, doctor."

"Almost commonplace," retorted Malloy.

Presently I mentioned that the Rhamda had come from the basement on the night that Ariadne had materialized; and I showed that the only possible route into the cellar was through the locked door in the breakfast room, since the windows were all too small, and there was no other door. Query: How had the Rhamda got there?

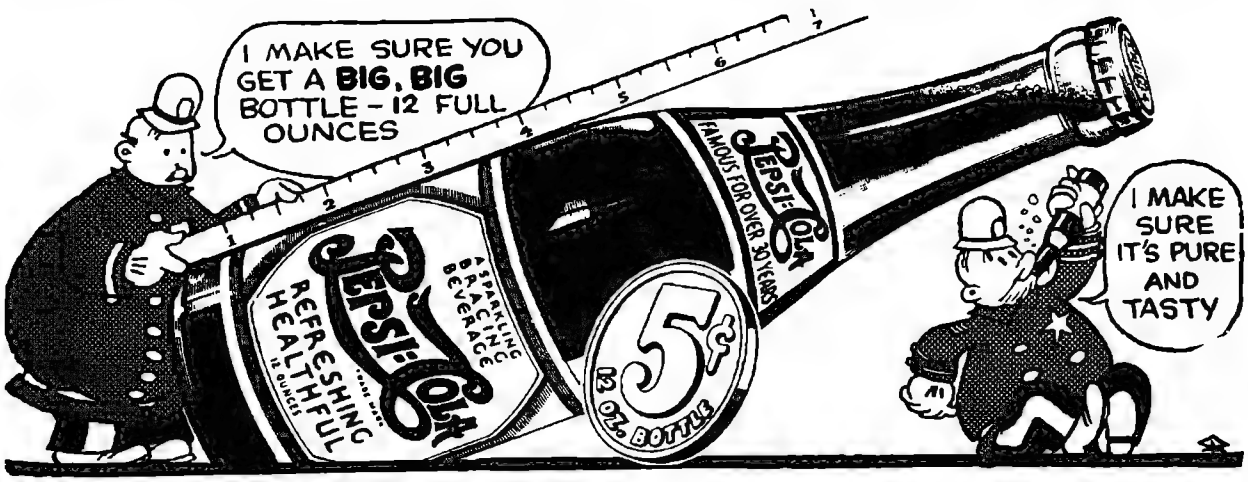
Immediately they all became alert. As Herold said:

"One thing or the other is true; either there is something down-stairs which has escaped you, Fenton, or else Avec is able to materialize any place he chooses. Let's look!"

WE ALL went down except Charlotte, who went up-stairs to stay with Ariadne. By turns, each of us held the ring. And as we unlocked the basement door we noted that the invisible, walking creature had reached there before us.

Down the steps went those unseen little feet, jumping from one step to the next just ahead of us all the way. When within three or four steps of the bottom, the creature made one leap do for them all.

I had previously run an extension cord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down into the basement, and both compartments could now be lighted by powerful incandescents. We gave the place a quick examination.

"What's all this newly turned earth mean?" inquired Sir Henry, pointing to the result of Jerome's effort a few months before. And I explained how he and Harry, on the chance that the basement might contain some clue as to the localization of the Blind Spot, had dug without result in the bluish clay.

Sir Henry picked up the spade, which had never been moved from where Jerome had dropped it. And while I went on to tell about the pool of liquids, which for some unknown reason had not seeped into the soil since forming there, the Englishman proceeded to dig vigorously into the heap I had mentioned.

The rest of us watched him thoughtfully. We remembered that Jerome's digging had been done after Queen's disappearance. And the dog had vanished in the rear room, the one in which Chick and Dr. Holcomb had last been seen. Now, when Jerome had dug the clay from the basement under this, the dining-room, he had thrown it through the once concealed opening in the partition; had thrown the clay, that is, in a small heap under the library. And—after Jerome had done this, the phenomena had occurred in the library, not in the dining-room.

"By Jove!" ejaculated General Hume, as I pointed this out. "This may be something more than mere coincidence!"

Sir Henry said nothing, but continued his spading. He paid attention to nothing save the heap that Jerome had formed. And with each spadeful he bent over and examined the clay very carefully.

Miss Clarke and the *madame* both remained very calm about it all. Each from her own viewpoint regarded the work as more or less a waste of time. But I noticed that they did not take their eyes from the spade.

Sir Henry stopped to rest. "Let me," offered Herold; and went on as the Englishman had done, holding up each spadeful for inspection. And it was thus that we made a strange discovery.

We all saw it at the same time. Imbedded in the bluish earth was a small, egg-shaped piece of light-colored stone. And protruding from its upper surface was a tiny, blood-red pebble, no bigger than a good-sized shot.

Herold thrust the point of his spade under the stone, to lift it up. Whereupon he gave a queer exclamation. He bent, and thrust his spade under the thing. And he put forth a real effort.

"Well, that's funny!" holding the stone up in front of us. "That little thing's as heavy as—as—it's *heavier* than lead!"

Sir Henry picked the stone off the spade. Immediately the material crumbled in his hands, as though rotting, so that it left only the small, red pebble intact. Sir Henry weighed this thoughtfully in his palm, then without a word handed it around.

We all wondered at the pebble. It was most astonishingly heavy. As I say, it was no bigger than a fair-sized shot, yet it was vastly heavier.

Afterward we weighed it, up-stairs, and found that the trifle weighed over half a pound. Considering its very small bulk, this worked out to a specific gravity of 192.6, or almost ten times as heavy as the same bulk of pure gold. And gold is heavy.

Inevitably we saw that there must be some connection between this unprecedentedly heavy speck of material and that lighter-than-air gem of mystery. For the time being we were careful to keep the two apart. As for the unexplained footsteps, they were still slightly audible, as the invisible creature moved around the cellar.

At last we turned to go. I let the others lead the way. Thus I was the last to approach the steps; and it was at that moment that I felt something brush against my foot.

I stooped down. My hands collided with the thing that had touched me. And I found myself clutching—

Something invisible—something which, in that brilliant light, showed absolutely nothing to my eyes. But my hands told me

I was grasping a very real thing, as real as my fingers themselves.

I made some sort of incoherent exclamation. The others turned and peered at me.

"What is it?" came Herold's excited voice.

"I don't know!" I gasped. "Come here."

But Sir Henry was the first to reach me. Next instant he, too, was fingering the tiny, unseen object. And such was his iron nerve and superior self-control, he identified it almost at once.

"By the Lord!"—softly. "Why, it's a small bird! Come here, folks, and—"

Another second and they were all there. I was glad enough of it; for, like a flash, with an unexpectedness that startles me even now as I think of it—

The thing became visible. Right in my grasp, a little, fluttering bird came to life.

CHAPTER XXVII

SOLVED!

IT WAS a tiny thing, and most amazingly beautiful. It could not have stood as high as a canary; and had its feathers been made of gleaming silver they could not have been lovelier. And its black-plumed head, and long, blossomlike tail, were such as no man on earth ever set eyes upon.

Like a flash it was gone. Not more than half a second was this enchanting apparition visible to us. Before we could discern any more than I have mentioned, it not only vanished, but it ceased to make any sounds whatever. And each of us drew a long breath, as one might after being given a glimpse of an angel.

Right now, five or six hours after the events I have just described, it is very easy for me to smile at my emotions of the time. How startled and mystified I was! And—why not confess it?—just a trifle afraid. Why? Because I didn't understand! Merely that.

At this moment I sit in my laboratory up-stairs in that house, rejoiceful in having reached the end of the mystery. For the enigma of the Blind Spot is no more. I have solved it!

Now twenty feet away, in another room, lies Ariadne. Already there is a faint trace of color in her creeks, and her heart is beating more strongly. Another hour, says Dr. Higgins, and she will be restored to us!

The time is seven P.M. I did not sleep at all last night; I haven't slept since. For the past five hours we have been working steadily on the mystery, ever since our finding that little, red pebble in the basement. The last three hours of the time I have been treating Ariadne, using means which our discoveries indicated. And in order to keep awake I have been dictating this account to a stenographer.

This young lady, a Miss Dibble, is downstairs, where her typewriter will not bother. Yes, put that down, too, Miss Dibble; I want folks to know everything! She has a telephone clamped to her ears, and I am talking into a mouth-piece which is fixed to a stand on my desk.

On that desk are four switches. All are of the four-way, two-pole type; and from them run several wires, some going to one end of the room, where they are attached to the Holcomb gem. Others, running to the opposite end, making contact with the tiny, heavy stone we found in the basement. Other wires run from the switches to lead bands around my wrists. Also, between switches are several connections—one circuit containing an amplifying apparatus. By throwing these switches in various combinations, I can secure any given alteration of forces, and direct them where I choose.

For there are two other wires. These run from my own lead bracelets to another pair, in another room; a pair clamped around the dainty wrists of the *only* girl—so far as I am concerned.

For I, Hobart Fenton, am now a living, human transforming station. I am converting the power of the Infinite into the Energy of Life. And I am transmitting that power directly out of the ether, as conduced through these two marvelous stones, back into the nervous system of the girl I love. Another hour, and she will Exist!

It is all so very simple, now that I un-

derstand it. And yet—well, an absolutely new thing is always hard to put into words. Listen closely, Miss Dibble, and don't hesitate to interrupt and show me where I'm off. We've got a duty to the public here.

To begin with, I must acknowledge the enormous help which I have had from my friends: Miss Clarke, Mme. De Cleire, General Hume, Dr. Malloy, and Herold. These folks are still in the house with me. I think they are eating supper. I'm ready to mine. Really, I can't take much credit to myself for what I have done so far. The others supplied most of the facts. I merely happened to fit them together and, because of my relationship to the problem, am now doing the heroic act of the week. Queer! I once begged Dr. Hansen to perform a blood transfusion, and now I am sending new life-force into Ariadne's veins—the Life Principle itself, as I like to call it a sacred privilege.

AS FOR Harry, he and Chick Watson and Bruce the dog I shall have them out of the Blind Spot inside of twelve hours. All I need is a little rest. I'll go straight to bed as soon as I finish reviving Ariadne. Yes, when I wake up, we'll see who's who, eh? Rhonda!

I'm too exhausted to hold myself down to the job of telling what I've discovered. But it's got to be done. Put it a fresh piece of paper, Miss Dibble. Have a rest!

I practically took my life in my hands when I first made connection. However, I observed the precaution of rigging up a primary connection direct from the ring to the pebble, running the wire along the floor some distance away from where I sat. No ill effects when I ventured into the line of force; so I began to experiment with the switches.

That preliminary circuit was Herold's idea. His, also, the amplifying apparatus. The mental attitude was Miss Clarke's, verified by Dr. Malloy. The lead bracelets were the *voodaun's* suggestion; they work fine. Sir Henry was the one who suggested that the advantage of the telephone in case—

Well, the first connection I tried resulted in nothing. Perfectly blank. Then I tried another, and another, meanwhile continually adjusting the coils of the amplifier; and as a result I am now able, at will, to do either or all of the following:

(1) I can induct sounds from the Blind Spot. (2) I can induct light, or visibility; (3) any given object or person, *in toto*.

And now to tell how. One moment, Miss Dibble: I wish you'd ask my sister to make another pot of chocolate, if Hansen approves. Yes, put that down, too. It's only fair to the public to know just how the thing affects me. No, no hurry, Miss Dibble. When she gets through eating. No, I'm just sleepy, not weak. Yes, that, too!

Let's see: where was I? Oh, yes; those connections. They've got to be done just right, with the proper tension in the coils,

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

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and the correct mental attitude, to harmonize. Oh, shucks; I wish I wasn't so tired.

One moment. No, no; I'm all right. I was just altering that *Beta* coil a bit; it was getting too hot. I— Queer! By Jove, that's going some! Say, Miss Dibble; a funny thing just now! I must have got an inducted current from another wire, mixed with these! And—I got a glimpse into the Blind Spot!

A GREAT— No; it's a— What a terrific crowd! Wonder what they're all— By Jove, it's *Good* Lord, it is he! And Chick! No, I'm not wandering, Miss Dibble! I'm having the experience of my life! Don't interrupt!

Now—*that's* the boy! Don't let 'em bluff you! Good! Good! Tell 'em where to head in! Just another minute, Miss Dibble! I'll explain when - That's the boy! Rush it in! I don't know what you're up to, but I'm with you!

Er—there's a big crowd of ugly looking chaps there, Miss Dibble; and I can't make it out— Just a moment—a moment, Miss— What does it mean, anyway? Just- I

Danger, by Heaven! *That's* what it means!

Miss Dibble! No; I'm all right. The— thing came to an end, abruptly. That's all; everything normal again; the room just the same as it was a moment ago. Hello! I seem to have started something! The wire down on the floor has commenced to hum! Oh, I've got my eye on it, and if anything—

Miss Dibble! Tell Herold to come! On the run! Quick! Did you? Good! Don't stop writing! I—

There's Chick! *Chick!* How did you get here? What? *You can't see me!* Why --

Chick! Listen! Listen, man! I've gone into the Blind Spot! Write this down! The connection -

That's Herold! Herold, this is Chick Watson! Listen, now, you two! The—the— I can hardly—it's from No. 4 to—to—to the ring—then- coil

Both switches, Chick! Ah! I've—

NOTE BY MISS L. DIBBLE. Just as Mr. Fenton made the concluding remark as above, there came a loud crash through the telephone, followed by the voice of Mr. Herold. Then, there came a very loud clang from a bell, just one stroke. After which I caught Mr. Fenton's voice:

"Herold—Chick can tell you what *it* wants as to—"

And with that, his voice trailed off into nothing, and died away. As for Mr. Fenton himself, I am informed that he has utterly disappeared, and in his stead there now exists a man who is known to Dr. Hansen as Chick Watson.

ANNOUNCEMENT

There will be no further installments of "The Blind Spot" running in FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES.

The complete story will be published in the July issue of FANTASTIC NOVELS, a new bi-monthly magazine featuring the long classics which so many of our readers have requested. This magazine will be on the newsstands May 8 and will be 25c. Be sure to ask for FANTASTIC NOVELS. Don't forget "The Blind Spot" has been a collectors' item heretofore, selling at premium prices. Now you may get it COMPLETE for only 25c.

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES will also run complete stories from now on. The August bi-monthly issue is to contain "Darkness and Dawn" by George Allan England—all four parts, and "The Rebel Soul," the novelet by Austin Hall.

Remember—the complete story "The Blind Spot," will be ready for you May 8.

Raiders of the Air

By HUBERT KELLEY and FRED T. BARTON

Crime in the mechanized world of 2231

ALMOST perpendicular over the great city hung a pale moon. In a main traffic air lane a late night passenger bus lumbered along with its propellers whirring noisily. The old, pitching carrier was almost an obsolete model of the year 2231. Far above in the government lane streaked the lights of the midnight European mailplane, moving silently across the sky. In nine short hours, if all went well, this plane, one of the latest Comet models, would drop the American mail in London, more than thirty-five hundred miles distant.

Down in the dank depths of the cañon-like streets of the city, walled so deeply by the mammoth buildings on either side that the moon's rays scarcely penetrated to the bottom, the atmosphere was odoriferous with a faint chemical.

In the deepest of these avenues, far down at the end of the great corridor, could be heard the sonorous hum of the street fans, draining the avenues of their day's accumulation of foul air. At intervals along the thoroughfare, automatic atomizers emitted pale gas clouds, which were immediately dissipated in the air torrent which poured down the street. In this way were the thoroughfares in the hours before the dawn being sterilized.

At a remote height above the street level, the night sky could be seen through scalloped rifts between the opposite buildings. There the broad landing disks, which surmounted every building, curved in and out with an almost artistic continuity.

The avenue was vaguely lighted with pendent phosphor bulbs, which were never refilled, and which perpetually emanated a dim, green light.

Suddenly a soft, metallic whir sounded and subsided and rose again. Through the sinister, pale-blue moon ray, a black object darted, deftly eluded the projection of a landing disk, and swooped against the wall of the tallest of the gigantic skyscrapers. The darting object was a Vampire plane, and, like a mud ball, it collided with the stone with a dull, rubbery thud, and remained fast.

This strange plane was so equipped with a heavy suction-plunger at its prow, that when a vacuum was created by dispelling the air through sudden pressure contact, it "sucked" a foothold on a perpendicular wall. A small upright propeller at the stern maintained the buoyancy of the machine as it hung suspended from the building.

TWO men, so high above as to appear insectlike, debarked from their transport, stepped out on a ledge of a window, under which the Vampire plane clung. They disappeared into the interior of the building.

Immediately at the laboratories of the metropolitan police department there was a stir. At one end of the spacious marble hall, whose walls were glittery with polished devices, an operator who, until a moment ago, was lounging idly in his chair, became active.

An electric bulb near by glowed out like a ruby. The operator hastily inserted a plug, seized his optophone, and clamped it to his eyes. For a moment he gazed as though fascinated into the optophone, which resembled a pair of binoculars with a little black metal box at the end. Quickly the operator placed the receivers over his ears.

Through the optophone the operator looked into the great exterior corridor about the vaults of the Continental Reserve Bank—the room into which the two men from the Vampire plane had stepped

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only a moment before. There, before the operator's eyes, loomed the massive vaults. They were not surrounded by gilded bars, but about them the floor was of large metal plates.

Through the receivers at his ears the operator heard the patter of the two men's feet over these metal slabs as plainly as though he himself was in the vault-room instead of a mile away at police headquarters. The two men in the vault-chamber were clad grotesquely from head to toe in black rubber suits which fitted them tightly, like a mold. They were standing in front of the treasure house, peering closely through their goggles at the great automatic locks. The two men felt the combinations with their rubber-covered fingers with the sensitive touch of experts.

Then the operator watched one of the men kneel and open a small satchel which he carried under one arm. From the satchel he took a torch, and handed a coil of wire to the other man, who dropped one strand of wire, equipped with a metal disk, to the floor, and applied a similar disc to the steel side of the vault.

There was a hiss, a blinding flash of blue light, and, presently, through the white smoke which, for a moment, filmed the process, the operator saw a trickle of red steel creep down the face of the vault.

The operator awakened, and jabbed with his foot at a button under his desk. Into the room bounded Hopkins, chief rayman of the department, and six other men.

"The Continental Reserve vaults—two men are burning their way into them," shouted the operator, continuing to peer into the optophone as he spoke.

"What — impossible — you're seeing things," snapped Hopkins.

"I'm seeing things, all right," shot back the operator excitedly. "They have immunized themselves with rubber suits, and instead of being electrocized by the voltage in the guard-plates, they've short-circuited our current with a deflecting torch and are burning out the locks."

"And that was one place we thought was yegg-proof," snarled Hopkins. And then to the six men who were crowded about, "Arm with rays, and we'll take the tube."

"THE doors are open," called the operator at the optophone. "They are both in the vault—they're out with their arms full of money-sacks. One is dumping packages of bank-notes on the floor—now they are carrying the sacks to the window —that's where they got in. By George, Hopkins, they must be using a Vampire plane—have it parked outside the window against the side of the building."

"It's the same gang that pulled that job at the Elmhurst Trust last week. Now we'll get them. Ready, men!" shouted Hopkins.

The six men who had run from the room had again appeared, each carrying an electric ray. One man, carrying two of these strange searchlight contrivances, handed one to Hopkins. The men followed the latter to one end of the laboratory, where all entered an elevator, which dropped dizzily for a moment, and then Hopkins and his squad emerged into a dim corridor.

At the side of the corridor the chief rayman pressed a button and a door lifted noiselessly in a slot. It opened into a great tube, and at the entrance was a car, equipped with deep, cushioned seats. The sides of the car were rounded. Into it filed the seven men. As a button was pressed by Hopkins, the outer door into the corridor closed, and the door to the bulletlike car slid shut. The seven men, crowded in the seats, looked ghostly in the light of the green phosphor bulb which lighted the compartment.

"Ready?" muttered Hopkins.

The men grunted in the affirmative.

"All right, here we go," and Hopkins pushed a tiny lever that worked on a dial in the dash of the car.

There was a shock, and one of the men gasped. The man next to him chuckled. Then the big aluminum projectile shot

silently through the great vacuum tube with a movement that was hardly perceptible. The seats were suspended and arranged to respond to the pull of gravity, and once the vacuum car traveled almost perpendicularly upward.

Hardly fifteen seconds passed before it came to an abrupt halt, and Hopkins stood up and pushed the button that opened the doors.

"Quiet, men, we are in the bank," he whispered. "Every man have his ray ready and follow me."

Each man examined his ray, and silently they filed down the corridor.

"Steady," warned the chief rayman, stopping at a door. "They are in the next room. At the word from me, be ready to let the juice fly."

Snap! The door shut up. In the thin white smoke which the sudden aperture framed, the hideous creatures, every line of their rude physiques molded in their tight rubber garments, stood aghast behind their goggles, half bent and still. The gold sacks toppled from their arms and fell to the metallic floor with awesome thuds.

One of the police guards stepped forward.

"Stand still," Hopkins shouted, "or you'll get the current. The vaults are still charged. And then to the two bank bandits, "Hands up, you—surrender!"

For answer the two criminals scurried toward the window, looking furtively over their shoulders as they ran, yet ever keeping an eery silence.

"Fire!" bawled the chief rayman.

Every police guard raised his ray. There was a blue sputter of seven arcs of electricity, which stabbed from the lenses like blue daggers.

One of the robbers waved a rubber-clad arm derisively as the blue flame played and jabbed at him when he stepped through the window, and then the two disappeared out into space. The police could not follow to the window because of the protective guard-plates about the room which carried the deadly current. Hopkins and his squad were completely outwitted, for the rubber suits of the bandits had deflected the stabbing electricity from the rays.

Even as the raymen shouted and cursed, there came a whir from the Vampire plane below the window-ledge.

"They are releasing the sucker," Hopkins yelled. "Quick, to the roof. There's a plane up there and we'll follow them."

AT A nauseating altitude on the side of the skyscraper the Vampire plane released its hold, fell for an instant, volplaned backward, regained its progress in a daringly executed circle. Then it darted down into the street—into a forbidden air lane.

Hopkins had not figured on the bandits keeping below the level of the landing disks. No planes were permitted below these disks, and most planes were so constructed that they could not descend into the cañon-like streets without colliding with the protruding disks.

But the escaping Vampire plane was small and able to dart between and below these without difficulty. The criminals, however, apparently were not familiar with the air currents in the lower street levels, for they darted into dangerous territory up the cañon in the darkness. The disaster came even as the ray squad, now at the top of the building, was manning its pursuit plane.

In the suction of one of the great ventilating street fans, the Vampire plane fought to extract itself. But, as a chip in this giant air whirlpool, it was borne down and sucked toward the monstrous whirling blades. Above the sonorous hum of the great ventilator could be heard the screams of the criminals.

The Vampire plane whirled like a leaf in the vortex, and then was shattered and ground into an infinite number of splinters. Plane, men, and gold were dragged alike through the great mill and cast out into the enormous air sewers of the metropolis.

Pegasus

By HENRY KUTTNER

Jim Harry knew how to tame a horse, but he didn't know being able to ride the winged steed was a perilous sort of joy

I WANT to tell you about Jim Harry Worth and the nag with wings. Now a lot of people think myths are just lying stories, sort of fairy tales that have grown big in the telling by old folks to young ones. And every country has its legends; in China I've heard about dragon ladies— But that's beside the point and I was going to tell you about Jim Harry and the magic horse he got for himself.

He was a tall, lanky, thin-faced youngster, brown as a nut, adolescently awkward when he stood still, but graceful as a colt when he moved. The Worths had a farm in Imperial, and Jim Harry was raised there, taught to do the chores and sent to school when he was old enough. He loved horse-flesh. The boy could ride, and he did, a lot.

It's open country here, and it's big. A kid can lie on his back out in the yellow slopes and look up at a sky that's bigger than all the world. He can lie there and watch the clouds drift till he feels that the earth is moving under him, till he feels the rush of a planet through the universe, and he has time to think. Jim Harry did, I know. The boy had a dream in his brown eyes, and his feet were touched with wanderlust. At first he didn't know what it was. He used to ride helter-skelter all over the place, and hike when he couldn't ride. Then at school he learned to read, and the Valley became a prison that was worse because it had no boundaries.

A dream in the eyes and restless feet— ah, but they are hell for a man, and heaven, too. That I know. You go wandering, and worse, for you go seeking as well, and what you seek you don't know and can never find.

You're trying to answer a question; you don't know what the question is; and in the end it's not answered. When you're tired at last you're ready to sit in the sun and think, but not when you're young. So young Jim Harry thought a lot, and read a great deal, and in a bad day he asked a question about Breadloaf Mountain that towered up to the south, barren and waterless and old.

"Nobody goes up there," said Andy Worth, Jim Harry's dad.

"But hasn't anybody ever gone?"

Andy didn't think so, but he had to go to town to buy some new saddles, so there wasn't much more conversation. Jim Harry's mother, Sarah, didn't know any more, and she told the boy not to bother about it. So Jim Harry went out with his older brother Tom, who was setting traps, and only got laughed at for his pains.

But he got the truth of it from Tante Rush. Some said she was a *paisano* and others said she was once a great woman and had been in Europe. Now she lived in a ramshackle frame building by a spring and kept pigs and chickens, a hag with a withered walnut of a face and eyes bright as garnets. People said she ate loco weed, and maybe she did. Anyway, she was a lonely old woman and because she liked company, she'd learned to listen and agree. The kids would come and talk to her by the hour, and she'd try to bribe them with her poor food to stay longer. Jim Harry went to see Tante Rush often, because she let him talk and didn't laugh at him, except in a kindly way.

Written especially for FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

Like a great rocket the horse fled up, and his wings beat the air with a noise like thunder

Tante Rush said there might be anything on top of Breadloaf Mountain.

"Nobody's ever been there, I guess, the crone said. "Pooty hard to climb, ain't it, Jim Harry? You never been and climbed it?"

"Probably nothing up there. Except it's the highest spot for miles. You can see way over the Valley. The boy thrust away a hen that came pecking at his worn shoe. "Maybe you can see out to the Pacific."

"They're mountains in the way, youngster. Ain't you never see the ocean?"

"I went to Frisco once with Pop. I got whacked, too. Ran away and went over to Sausalito—climbed up Tamalpais."

"You like to climb, heh?"

"Yeah, he said. "I like high places. Say, you ever heard of Pegasus?" He pronounced the word wrongly, staring up at Breadloaf.

"Nope. What is it?"

"Just a story. About a horse with wings. It was supposed to live on a mountain, or come down there once in a while, anyway."

"I heard of unicorns," Tante Rush said doubtfully, wriggling a loose incisor back and forth. "Horses might grow horns, but hardly wings, I guess. What good would they do?"

"I dunno." Jim Harry rolled over on his back and lay in the weeds, watching the clouds move toward Breadloaf. He was silent for a time; then, half asleep, he mused, "Wonder if maybe Pegasus is up on Breadloaf."

"Shouldn't wonder, Tante Rush mumbled agreeably. "Ain't nobody to say no."

"I think—maybe—" Jim Harry sat up. "I got nothing to do today except fix the barn, and that'll wait a bit. I guess I'll go climb Breadloaf."

"It's too hot," the old woman objected, sighing. "I'll fix some corn bread if you wait a bit."

"Nope." He stood up, started off, and then came back. "Got any sugar?"

Tante Rush found a few bits, which Jim Harry dropped in the pocket of his overalls. Then he went up the trail. When he was hidden from sight, the crone suddenly laughed the high, whinnying laughter of age. "Kids, she said. "Kids!" A bit of sugar remained in her hand, and she popped it into her mouth, munching slowly. "A horse with wings! Kids!"

BUT Jim Harry went up Breadloaf, and after a while he met a funny, gnarled, humpbacked dwarf of a man hobbling along on a crooked stick. The manling looked at Jim Harry steadily and said, "I hear that you're going after the winged horse, boy."

Jim Harry got a queer uneasy feeling, and wanted to run away. But the dwarf reached out his crooked staff and barred the path.

"Don't be afraid of me, youngster," he said. "Why you're almost twice as big as I am. And you haven't got your full growth yet."

Jim Harry tried to broaden his chest, though he knew he was skinny for his age. "I don't know you," he said.

"I've seen you in town, though. So you're after Pegasus."

"Is that the way to say it?" Jim Harry blushed, for he thought the dwarf was making fun of him. "Nope. I'm just hiking."

The other's deep-set eyes were a little sad. "You're learning fast, boy Already you fear laughter. Ah, go on up Breadloaf; you'll find Pegasus. But how the devil do you expect to ride him? He won't take a saddle, but you'll need a bridle."

Jim Harry looked sullen and traced designs in the dust with his toe-cap.

"Well, you go on up, and I shouldn't be surprised if you found a bridle on a rock somewhere. But don't forget that Pegasus belongs to the sky. He'll be your feet and take you away and away; he'll be your eyes and see wonderful things. But don't let him stay on the ground long."

The last words sighed out like the rustle of the wind. When Jim Harry looked up the little man was gone, though the tap-tap of the staff drifted up from below.

The boy was tempted to go down and

retrace his steps, for he was sensitive to mockery. But then he looked up and saw the top of Breadloaf, and he couldn't help himself after that. And it was a funny thing, but about half a mile further Jim Harry saw a grand bridle lying on a rock just beside the trail. He was a little frightened at first. Then he went on up, carrying the bridle and wondering about the dwarf.

It was hard to reach the summit. Jim Harry was bleeding in several places, and his overalls were sadly torn, when at last he scrambled over the lip of the rock and rolled down a grassy slope. He got up and looked around. The summit wasn't very large; it was saucer-shaped, covered with fine pasturage, and there was a little pool of rain-water in the depressed center. There were a few bushes, but no sign of any horse, winged or otherwise.

So Jim Harry went up to the rim and looked way out at all the world spread underneath him. The Imperial Valley lay little and unreal to the blue western mountains. In back of him the white-capped Sierras towered. And the winds that blew upon him had never been breathed by earthly being.

Jim Harry's feet started to itch, and he wanted to walk right out into the air and away off to the west beyond those shadowy dim ranges, and he wanted to go in the other direction over the Sierras. And north were the snow-lands, and south was Mexico and Panama, and it was a wonder Jim Harry didn't just fall over the edge in his excitement and kill himself. But something made him look up, and there was a speck in the sky, getting larger.

Maybe it was the dream in the boy's eyes that made him recognize Pegasus. Anyway, he ran down to the pool and dropped a few bits of sugar there, and then made a trail of it to the nearest bush. He hid himself in that bush and waited. And Pegasus came.

Ah, but that horse was God's own wonder! A stallion, with high-arched neck, and fine withers, and a white coat that glistened like the stars themselves, and a mane that flew like the borealis, and eyes that could be red as mad flame, and soft and melting as a baby's. Lord, but a man could die after having seen Pegasus, and reckon himself very lucky. And the wings on the stallion! White as an egret's feathers, the powerful pinions spread from the shoulders and glistened in the sun.

Wheeling he came. White against the blue he circled and dropped, and started up in affright, and landed gently as any sparrow beside the pool, and the great wings were furled, and the hoofs of Pegasus spurned the earth. He drank, daintily, and cropped the grass, and fell to playing, kicking up his heels like a colt, and laughing as horses do, and turning back his lovely head to nip at the feathered wings, and all the while Jim Harry watched in a dream.

Pegasus fell to cropping again, and discovered the sugar. Perhaps he mistook it for ambrosia. At any rate, he savored the sweet and followed the trail up to the bush where Jim Harry crouched hidden. There he started back, but too late. The boy clapped on the bridle, and as Pegasus spread his wings for flight Jim Harry leaped on his back and was off!

And like a rocket the great stallion fled up, his muscles shuddering against the boy's thighs. The wings beat the air with a noise of thunder. Pegasus threw back his head and screamed; he trumpeted his amazement and wrath; and the mane struck Jim Harry's face and made his nose bleed. But he reins were coiled tight around brown fists. The strong thighs were tensed. And only Gabriel with his flaming sword could have knocked Jim Harry from his seat then.

The winds were a gale. Pegasus somersaulted in the air. Jim Harry threw his arms around the neck and clung. Somehow he stuck on. Looking down he could see Breadloaf incredibly far below; he could see beyond the Sierras and out to the Pacific.

Now a funny thing happened. Pegasus, being a horse, loved sugar, and being something more than a horse, he was more than

ordinarily smart. So what did he do but reach his head around, sailing along at an even keel with the wings spread horizontally, and nudge Jim Harry's pocket where he smelled the sugar.

At first the boy didn't understand. Then he took out the sweet and fed his mount. He stroked the velvet muzzle, felt the lip of the horse against his palm, and loved the steed. And when the sugar was gone, Pegasus seemed tame enough. He let Jim Harry guide him as though he'd been broken to harness all his life. And I have no words nor heart to tell of that flight through the blue, and of what Jim Harry thought and felt I should not like to say.

But at last the sun was westering and Jim Harry decided to go home. He was late anyway, and he wanted to show Pegasus to his father and mother and his brother. So down they went past Breadloaf till the farm lay spread beneath them.

But nobody was home. The family had gone to town because it was Saturday night, and the hired man was with them. Jim Harry didn't quite know what to do with Pegasus, and he wouldn't put him in the stable; Pegasus couldn't have stood the smell. Finally he put the winged horse in the pasture, tying him with a long rope. Then he went into the house.

THAT night he took a short ride on Pegasus, getting home about ten o'clock and going to bed right away, for he was tired and fagged. He didn't hear the family come in, and they didn't notice Pegasus in the darkness.

So, anyway, Jim Harry woke up in the dawn to find his father shaking him, looking pretty white and sick. Old Andy Worth knew horse-flesh, and he knew Pegasus couldn't exist. Yet a stallion with wings was in the north pasture, and every time Andy tried to get close the beast would sail up like a bird.

"He's mine, Jim Harry said. "I caught him up on Breadloaf yesterday."

"Gosh A'mighty," said Andy. "A freak like that must belong to somebody. Pull on your pants and come on."

So they went down to the pasture, and Pegasus, who had broken his rope in the night, shot up, trailing it like a tail. Jim Harry felt awful. It was like losing his right arm.

"Yell at him," Andy said. "Maybe he'll come to you."

Jim Harry did. Pegasus came down and skitted around nervously, with a wary eye on Andy.

"Grab the reins," said the older man. "That's it. Now—hey, hold on!" For Pegasus lunged away, dragging Jim Harry after him. "Won't let me get near him, hey? Well, he'll learn." Andy scrutinized the horse closely. "They're real, all right. I never heard the like. Now just what happened yesterday, Jim Harry, and don't give me no lies."

So Jim Harry told his dad all about it. Andy believed what he wanted to. "They's no brand on the beast. Get him in the stable. I'll go get some sugar."

"I don't want to put him in the stable," Jim Harry started to say, but only got a box on the ear for his trouble.

Anyhow, they put Pegasus in the stable, and had a hard time quieting him. He kept bruising his wings against the stalls, fluttering around for a while like a caged chicken. Andy made Jim Harry tie him up pretty carefully, with leather and rawhide, and the boy got quite a few swats for objecting. Then they went back to the house to get Sarah, Tom, and Buck, the hired man.

Jim Harry should have been excited at the prospect of showing off Pegasus, but he wasn't. The horse looked different in the stable. He kept jerking up his head, his nostrils twitching in disgust at the foul odors. The other horses were afraid of him, too.

"I'm going to get Doc West," Andy said, rubbing his stubbled lean chin. "He can tell if it's fake or not. Though I don't see how it can be, rightly."

Doc West, the vet, said Pegasus was a sport. He'd never heard the like, either, but he'd seen two-headed calves, and there'd been a baby with a goat's head

born to a woman in the next county, once. Doc West leered at Andy and talked in an undertone, casting quick glances at Sarah, who stood self-consciously aside, watching Pegasus. Jim Harry listened, but some of the things he heard made him feel sick. Tom, his brother, stood with open mouth, breathing hard. And the smell of the stable was everywhere. This wasn't like riding the skies with Pegasus. It was pretty awful.

Nobody seemed to realize that Pegasus belonged to Jim Harry, or that Jim Harry belonged to Pegasus. His ears still smarted from his father's calloused palm. There was no help from his mother, either; she'd nearly fainted when she learned that Jim Harry had been riding through the air on the winged horse. It wasn't natural, she said.

"But a thing like that has to belong to somebody," Andy said.

"If it does, you'll hear about it. You got a mint of money in that nag," said Doc West, casting a greedy glance at Pegasus. "You wouldn't think of selling him, now, would you?"

"Gosh, no. I'm going to—I dunno. Maybe rent him out to a zoo, or something. He's worth plenty, I bet."

Jim Harry ran over to Pegasus and stood in front of the stall. "He's mine. You can't have him—"

"Don't use that tone of voice to me," Andy grunted. "What would you do with him? Break your fool neck, and it's a wonder you didn't do it already. Leaving the horse out in the pasture all night with a broke rope. Miracle he didn't go off for good.

"Can he honest to gosh fly?" Tom wanted to know. Doc West, too, looked an inquiry.

"Sure can. I saw him. Andy went toward the stall, but changed his mind when Pegasus flung back and reared, snorting. "Doc, I want you should send some telegrams for me when you get back to town."

"You're sure you don't want to sell him—"

But Andy wouldn't sell, and wires were sent to various people. There weren't many answers. Nobody believed in a winged horse. It looked like just another fake—another Barnum mermaid. One man came from Los Angeles to check up, but even he wouldn't buy or rent Pegasus for his circus.

"Yeah, I know it's real," he said, looking puzzled. "But, ye gods, who'd believe it? Everybody'd yell fake. If we advertised a winged horse and showed 'em a colt with bumps on his shoulders, they'd be satisfied. But this—it's too real. People'd never believe it. They'd think we glued the wings on. It's too good to be true."

"You could let him fly around," Andy suggested. "That'd show he was real."

"Will he fly with a rope on him?"

Andy had already made Jim Harry try this, without success. "Nope. But he can be ridden—he's broken pretty well."

"Catch me riding him! Not even a trapeze artist would do it. It'd be suicide, man. I'll talk to the boss about it, but it isn't much use. Not unless we clipped all the feathers off the wings. People might swallow it then."

Jim Harry was listening through a knothole, and he started to shake. When the man was gone he accosted his father.

"You wouldn't do that, would you? Pluck Pegasus' feathers off—"

"Nah, Andy said absent-mindedly. "Listen, Jim Harry, I want you should see how that horse can run. Not fly—just run. You let him get off the ground and I'll skin you."

Jim Harry was only too glad to seize the opportunity of getting on Pegasus' back again. The horse was fast. He went around the north pasture like greased lightning, his wings folded back and his hoofs spurning the ground. Andy, watching from the rail fence, took off his straw hat and fanned himself. "Okay," he called at last. "Rub him down and stable him."

THE next day Andy sent more telegrams, and got a man out to time Pegasus with a stop-watch. The two conferred for some time after that.

Jim Harry caught snatches of the conversation. "More money in it, anyway circuses are dead now faster than Man o' War ever was but you can't ."

The two looked stealthily at Jim Harry and moved further away.

All this worried the boy. He went to the stable, where Tom was trying to get near Pegasus, with no success at all.

"He's ornery," Tom said. "Needs breaking. I could do it, too.

Jim Harry thought of spurs and whips, and went white. He squabbled a bit with Tom, till the older boy left. Then Jim Harry fed Pegasus sugar and rubbed him down carefully, afterwards mixing him a bran mash and getting fresh rain-water

The winged horse was drooping. His eye had lost its fire, and the proud neck was no longer arched. Pegasus nudged his nose under Jim Harry's arm and pushed at him, as though inviting the boy to take a ride.

"Gee, I'd like to. But I can't. Pop'd skin me. I wish I'd never brought you back here, Pegasus. I'd let you go now, if—" But that was no good. Andy would make Jim Harry call the winged horse back, and Pegasus would probably obey his adopted master. Jim Harry remembered Breadloaf and the flight down the winds, and then he sat down in the stall and bawled like a baby. But that did no good, either.

Some weeks passed, and Andy began to look more and more sullen and angry. Tom kept begging him for permission to break Pegasus, till he was sent sprawling under the blow of a hard palm. Sarah didn't say much, but she made every excuse to keep Jim Harry away from the horse. She knew Pegasus wasn't good for him. The horse was a freak, and dangerous, and it put ideas into the boy's head. He was queer enough already.

So one day Andy sent Jim Harry to town with Buck, and for some reason they took a back road that wound through the mountains. The old Ford wheezed and chugged, its worn tires screeching on sharp curves. Buck, a big-shouldered, bad-tempered lout, talked little.

"We got plenty of saddles," Jim Harry said, squirming about on the broken springs. "Why get another now? And why do I have to go along?"

"You do what your old man says," Buck grunted, trying to push the brake through the floorboards. To the right the cliff dropped into a sheer abyss. On the left a steep slope mounted. The motor started to boil, and just then they rounded a bend and came in sight of a gnarled dwarf standing beside the road, gripping a twisted stick in his big hands.

Jim Harry recognized the little man. He told Buck to stop, but the hired man just cursed hitch-hikers and went right past. He didn't go far, though, because the engine went dead and the brakes locked. The dwarf called to Jim Harry.

"It's a bad thing they're doing to Pegasus, boy," he said. "They sent you to town to get you out of the way."

Jim Harry's heart went down in his boots. "What are they doing?" he asked.

"Your father's going to make Pegasus into a race-horse. He's fast, you know, and there's more money in that than in circuses. But nobody would let a winged horse run, so Doc West is with your father, and they're going to operate and take off Pegasus' wings. That's why they sent you to town. It'll kill Pegasus, boy—"

"Shut your trap!" Buck roared, and cursed the dwarf obscenely. He jumped out of the car and ran toward the other, his fist lifted. Jim Harry had seen Buck knock men out with that dangerous hand, and he cried out and tried to scramble out of the Ford. But his overalls had caught on the broken springs.

Jim Harry's help wasn't needed, though. The dwarf just lifted his crooked stick and hit Buck with it. It didn't look like a hard blow; yet Buck collapsed in a heap, knocked cold as an iceberg.

"He isn't dead," the dwarf said. "Just stunned. But you'd better be getting back home, boy. The car will work now, I guess. I told you not to let Pegasus stay on the ground long. He belongs to the sky."

Jim Harry had slid over under the wheel

and was trying to start the motor. It caught easily enough. The brakes weren't locked any more, either. Jim Harry turned the car around with some difficulty on the narrow road, and went kiting back home hell-for-leather.

It was a wonder he didn't kill himself. The funny part was that he got through the mountains all right, and nothing happened till he was home. A crude plank bridge lay across the irrigation ditch that bounded the road; at the best of times it was pretty shaky. Jim Harry swerved too quickly, and the left front tire hit something and blew out. The Ford turned and went right over the edge of the bridge. It wasn't much of a drop, and there was only a trickle of water in the ditch, but somehow the car seemed to turn over and fold up like an accordion. Jim Harry was knocked out for a minute or so. Agony brought him back to life.

He was lying in the wreck, and his right foot was one throbbing bundle of pain. It seemed to be pinned under the car, and, in fact, it had been mashed between metal and a rock that lay buried in the mud If the car hadn't settled and slid away a bit Jim Harry might have stayed there till help came. And apparently nobody had heard the crash, because a horse was screaming in the stable.

JIM HARRY smelled something burning. His foot was free now, and he tried to get up. But he couldn't, so he squirmed along in the mud and somehow scrambled up the sloping side of the ditch. Then he looked at his foot, trailing along behind him.

Well, it wasn't a foot any more. No surgeon could help it. Jim Harry might eventually learn to use a crutch pretty well, though. But you'll remember the wanderlust that was in his feet, and it's no great wonder that Jim Harry felt like going back into the ditch and smashing his skull open against a bit of jagged metal that was sticking up there.

Instead, he screamed.

The outcry from the barn ceased suddenly. Then there was a trumpeting, furious noise. Have you ever heard a horse shriek? It's like nothing else on God's earth. Pegasus shrieked, and the men within the barn began to yell, too. There was the sound of wood being smashed, and the trample of swift hoofs. The stable's door burst open; for a second the rearing figure of the winged horse was outlined, white and rampant, hoofs flying, nostrils red and inflamed.

A man was yelling in agony; another was cursing luridly.

Pegasus, trailing broken thongs and a snapped chain, thundered down the meadow. His wings spread, and he cried out in pain. Blood dappled one mighty pinion.

He rose, circled, and swept down toward Jim Harry. Lightly as a feather he alighted beside the prostrate boy. His neck arched; he nudged Jim Harry's face with his velvety muzzle. The youngster reached up to put his arms around the strong neck.

Men came running. "Hold him! What's happened? Hold on to him!"

Jim Harry looked into the eyes of Pegasus, and man and horse understood each other. The boy rose, lifting himself by gripping the long mane; he gritted his teeth to keep from crying in agony. And Pegasus knelt, so that Jim Harry could mount upon the broad back. There was no rein, but it was not needed.

The running men were very close when Pegasus spurned the earth. Up he went, favoring one wing a little, but seeming to find new strength as he mounted. Jim Harry held on to the mane. He looked down and saw the farm getting smaller and smaller. And he saw Breadloaf to the east, and the Sierras to the east beyond it.

"Higher, he whispered. "Higher, Pegasus."

He could see beyond the Sierras. He could see the Pacific. The sharp wind cooled his burning, crushed foot. On each side the great wings rose and fell steadily, rhythmically.

"Higher—"

Pegasus threw back his head and answered. Up they went, riding the winds, and now the farm was invisible and Breadloaf was dwindling; and the Valley no longer seemed immense.

Then, queerly enough, the gnarled old dwarf was talking, though Jim Harry couldn't see him anywhere.

"Remember what I told you, boy. Pegasus will be your feet and take you away and away; he'll be your eyes and see wonderful things. But don't let him stay long on the ground."

"I won't," Jim Harry promised.

"Never come down again, Pegasus. Go on up—"

The wind was bitterly cold. The sky was darkening to purple. Faintly a few stars appeared. The earth revolved, with a slow and majestic motion, incredibly far beneath the hoofs of Pegasus.

The fingers of Jim Harry tightened on the horse's mane. Then, slowly, gradually, they began to loosen their grip.

South Sea Island Mystery

COUNTLESS are the mysteries of the islands of the Pacific: lost civilizations, races and cultures, extinct tribes of people who were giants! But one of the most mystifying and incongruous of all is that of the ancient city of Metalanim, located on the southeastern shore of distant Ponape, which is an easterly island of the Caroline group and hundreds of miles from anywhere.

The ruins, half-submerged in the warm sea, are as vast as the ruins of Rome! The streets appear to have been canals; and the colossal proportions of the breastwork-defenses and thick stone walls still perplex anthropologists and students of Pacific history

How could this megalithic city of enormous blocks of rock (some of them weighing thirty tons or more!) have sprung into being thousands of miles from any continental area, from any center of known civilization, completely off all routes of ocean traffic? More, where did the manpower come from? It is estimated that it would have taken tens of thousands of strong men years and years to build such a city. Yet nowhere is there evidence to sustain a theory that there were once great numbers of people in this part of the great archipelago. Metalanim remains an unhistoried, strange mystery.

Whoever the great architect may have been (and there is nothing whatsoever to indicate even in what far age this great rock city was built), it is certain that he commanded a horde of men—possibly recruited from countless islands of a vast ocean empire long since submerged beneath the sea.

—*Martin Heflin*

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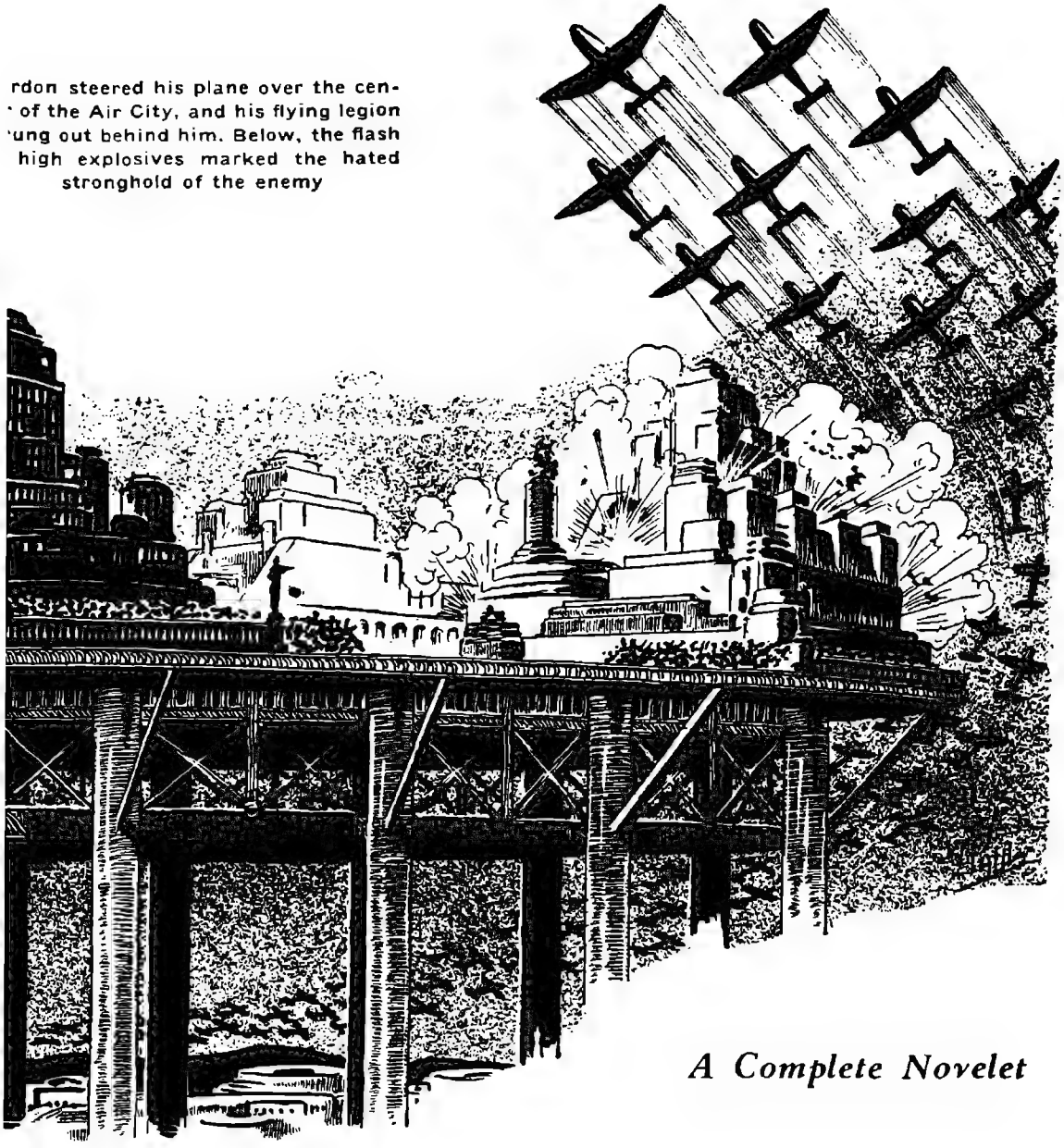

rdon steered his plane over the cen- of the Air City, and his flying legion ung out behind him. Below, the flash high explosives marked the hated stronghold of the enemy

A Complete Novelet

A World of Indexed Numbers

By WILL McMORROW

CHAPTER I

SHOWING THAT WHAT GOES UP—

PUT! Put! Put! Pur-r-r-r! Put! Put! The motor sputtered again, hesitated, and roared smoothly. Associate Professor Bardon wrinkled his smooth forehead in perplexity, peered through his goggles, superimposed over his neat, academic tortoise shells, and studied the oil gauge on the instrument board.

He hoped there was nothing wrong with the darned thing. It had been acting strangely ever since he took off at the

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field. It wouldn't do to be late again for the philosophy class.

The dean had seemed somewhat cold to Associate Professor Bardon's lame explanation about a forced landing the last time Bardon was late for his class period. Bardon's flying hobby seemed to the dean of less importance than the curriculum of Calloway College. And young Bardon disliked the idea of being out of a teaching job.

He scratched his shapely nose with a lean forefinger, and considered the possibilities. It might be a defective spark plug. It might be 'most anything.

Bardon knew a lot more about philosophy than he did about flying, in spite of the flying course he had just concluded. This particular airplane—Wasp engined, single seater, rotary motor, air-cooled, and all the rest—he had just received from the manufacturer and had had it assembled that morning, paying for it in full with his only thousand dollars. He hated the idea of wrecking it in a crash. He disliked the idea of wrecking himself. Of course he could sue the manufacturer if anything went wrong—or Bardon's heirs could—but even a philosopher could find but cold consolation in that thought.

He glanced over the side at the checkered farm lands two thousand feet below, and rather wished he had taken another lesson in landing over rough country.

The even drone of the engine reassured him, and he returned to the even and pleasurable tenor of his ordered mind. For all his flying hobby, Associate Professor Bardon was a serious and thoughtful young man.

He would like to step out a bit today from the beaten path. There was a little lecture on the fourth dimension he hoped to be able to spring on the class some day. Einstein's theory had opened up vistas—rather daring, of course—the interchangeability of time and space.

Suppose one were to fly off this way into space—impossible, of course, but suppose one could get away from the things universal, out of touch, so to speak, would time cease to exist? Would life, motion, measurement stop and project one a thousand years ahead or a thousand years behind?

Just as if a man stepped for a moment from a moving platform and climbed on again after awhile to find himself among new faces, new things—

Professor Alpheus Corr had argued somewhat along those lines. Queer fellow, Alpheus Corr! Little, twisted man continually cracking his red knuckles and smiling sidewise—whimsically, as if he alone could see the joke. Bardon had met him after the lecture at the society's Wednesday meeting, and listened to Alpheus Corr's weird speculations on the relativity of time for an hour.

Bardon peered at the oil gauge again. It seemed to show a good circulation. He leaned back in his narrow seat and frowned ahead.

He *had* been a trifle overenthusiastic, of course, in that lecture. He remembered the exact words he had delivered while watching Alpheus Corr's sardonic smile in the front row of the audience, and he repeated them.

"Airmen," he had concluded, "have spanned the seas. Soon we shall span the universe. New achievements — incredible things — beckon men onward. Farther planets await all-conquering men. Time, space we can eliminate. Picture the scene of the future! Air liners drifting across the skies! Life comfortable and happy and joyous! Hanging gardens! Celestial mansions! Merchant ships of the air plowing the blue! (That part about plowing the blue had been excellent.) No congestion, no traffic snarls, no international boundaries of hatred and fear! A world of sunlight and freedom! Human nature itself changed! The millennium—"

The ship gave a lurch as Bardon bent quickly forward.

Put! Put! Pu— then silence, except for the soughing of the air passing through the wire-bracing.

He looked quickly over the side. With the engine dead, it was a case of a forced

landing somewhere and no time for philosophical speculation, either, as to when and where.

Below showed the tops of trees, the coppery sheen of overhead wires, the thin line of fences, and the clustered roofs of cottages. It looked very unpromising. He pushed the control stick forward slightly, and the plane dipped toward the roof tops, sweeping in a wabbly, unpracticed curve downward.

Bardon's thin fingers tightened on the control. This wasn't going to be easy. There were things in the way—hard, concrete things such as brick walls and thick tree trunks—and he had an idea there would be quite a jolt unless he managed to "pancake" down flat into a clearing or someone's front lawn.

Beyond an advancing line of Normandy poplars he caught a glimpse of what seemed to be a fairly open green expanse—perhaps a golf course. His left foot moved forward, pushing the rudder, and the plane inclined that way, banking dangerously and sideslipping at a furious rate.

Now, if he could only clear the trees and find everything right for him in the open space—no ditches or stone walls. If he could clear the trees, he might still give that lecture on the fourth dimension, and Professor Alpheus Corr could smile—

The wind shrilled by his ears and the line of Normandy poplars seemed to shoot beneath the wing tips of the plane, disclosing not a cleared field but a quick vision of rutted road, telegraph wires. A gray square building loomed up directly in front of the plane.

Associate Professor Bardon closed his eyes as a man would who prefers not to see the descending sword of the executioner. He threw his arms out in an instinctive gesture over his bowed head.

CHAPTER II

ZONE 87-A, SEA LEVEL

INSTEAD of the terrific shock of impact, Bardon felt the ship touch lightly on the ground, bound into the air with the recoil of the rubber tires and landing gear, and roll forward with a splintering of wing panels.

His eyes popped open.

Missed it, after all, by jiminy! He'd never have thought it. Talk about luck!

He grabbed the control-stick just in time to avoid crashing into a heavy three-decker plane of curious shape that was taxiing across the greensward. Careening down the level lawn in a large circle, Bardon swung the nose of his lop-sided ship around and halted, beside a tall steel post, facing backward whence he came.

The gray square of building was still there, but now he was on the other side. He wondered again how he had escaped hitting its vast bulk. He looked around at his surroundings and wondered more.

Familiar with the Long Island flying fields as he was, Bardon found it impossible to place this one. It covered at least two hundred acres, and every acre was crowded with odd-shaped ships as no field of Bardon's knowledge could be—and find room for a take-off. Groups of people, gayly dressed, were climbing aboard the biggest airplane Bardon had ever seen.

That was some distance off. Nearer at hand, atop the tall steel posts, smaller planes alighted and departed. Overhead a constant stream of flyers passed.

On four sides of the green lawn were squat, square, gray buildings almost windowless and with no entrance below the roof tops. Everything was vast and marvelously clean and painfully orderly, and—strangest of all to Bardon—there was neither noise of racing motors nor smell of gasoline.

He wondered how far he could have come. Odd that he hadn't known of an active place like this. Probably an experimental field—but still, all those ships and that traffic overhead—

He climbed out of his cockpit. Underfoot the grass was as close and fine as the putting-green of a millionaire's golf links. He had remarked to himself that the platform overhead was of glass, thicker glass than he had ever seen, and that brightly shin-

ing midges seemed dancing on the sunlit horizon, when his attention was taken up by the movement of the big three-decker beside him.

From inside came a dull humming sound, and the silvery fuselage with its inadequate-looking, atrophied wings rose straight up into the air

"A helicopter," he muttered. "Quite a crowd aboard too. What the deuce field is this, anyway?"

Straight down from the blue a tiny plane dropped to a landing beside Bardon. From beneath the folded wings a young man emerged through a sliding door and stepped up to Bardon.

"Sorry. You'll have to come along with me, sir."

He motioned toward the gray building nearest. He appeared a courteous enough fellow, but brisk and keen-eyed. But his costume struck Bardon as odd, to say the least—tightly fitting coat fastened with corded frogs, short knee breeches and round skullcap—all of a sober, maroon silk.

He shot a curious glance at Bardon from head to foot, and if the professor of philosophy was amused at the newcomer's getup, the latter evidently returned the compliment.

"Odd," he murmured. "Impersonating an historical character, I suppose. Nothing in the Sumptuary Laws of Dress about that costume. I fear you'll have to explain that, too, to the board. Come with me, sir.

"What for?" Bardon frowned. "What is the big idea?"

"The big—I don't understand you exactly. Oh, you mean the charge? Obstructing free passage of air-goers. Please don't create a disturbance here. You are probably familiar with the Air Laws. You violated chapter 645 by crossing here. Besides that dress!"

Bardon's lean face flushed.

"Say, are you kidding me? Listen, I've no time to waste here. I'm Professor Bardon of Calloway, and I'm in rather a hurry Lecture in half an hour. If you will oblige me by calling a taxi or showing me the nearest phone—"

"Taxi—? Phone?" the pink-cheeked young man repeated, blinking rapidly. "Will you kindly tell me what kind of talk that is, sir?"

"Plain English," retorted Bardon, looking around helplessly. "I seem to have wandered into some kind of nut factory, here. Suppose you trot along to the masquerade, and I'll find my way about. What place is this, anyway?"

The young man brightened. "I understand you now. I'm afraid you talk a peculiar jargon, if you don't mind my saying so. This is Zone 87-A, Sea Level. You must have come far."

He caught sight of Bardon's damaged plane, and his rather hard blue eyes opened wi ler.

"Shades of the Wright brothers!" he gasped. "Where in the air did you get that antique? And no license tag! I'm afraid this is serious, sir."

"Antique! It's the latest type, I'll have you know," Bardon snapped resentfully. "Cost me a round thousand dollars cash."

The man in maroon silk smiled affably.

"Historical character, I see. You play it well, sir. But we can't remain joking here. Come along and explain it to the board. If you are flying the thing for a joke, you can explain it satisfactorily, I'm sure—though the board has no sense of humor when it comes to the Air Laws and the Dress Laws—especially 645."

"I'm sorry I disturbed your field requirements," Bardon nodded smilingly "They won't hang me, I suppose, for dropping in this way. But as a citizen of the United States peaceably inclined—"

The other interrupted him with upraised hand. The smile had faded from his face, and he shot a suspicious glance at Bardon.

"The United States," the man repeated, slowly and soberly. "The words were apparently unfamiliar and he gave them a peculiar flat intonation. "Evidently you belong to the Flying Class, sir, or you would not be here. But your use of that ancient term—your dress—that machine—"

He broke off and studied Bardon guardedly.

"May I ask, sir, where you consider yourself to be and what age you think you are living in? You said something about the United States. If I remember my history—though I didn't get a Flying Class education—this zone has not gone by that name since 1974 or 1975—some eighty odd years. If you will step over to the board—

"Wait a minute. Bardon leaned heavily against the wrecked fuselage of his ship.

He looked slowly around at the crowded field, the three deckers rising into the air, the oddly clad people bustling on and off the flying vessels, the stream of aerial traffic overhead. He wondered whether he had suddenly gone insane —wondered if he was dreaming it all.

But the broken plane was solid enough beneath his hand, and the people, several of whom were approaching curiously, apparently not shadows.

BARDON felt an emptiness in his stomach and a wabbly feeling in his knees. Eighty years! Dim suspicion of the truth knocked for admission to his conscious mind.

"What—what year is this?" he asked hoarsely.

The young man, who had been beckoning over his shoulder toward two others uniformed as he was, looked sidewise at Bardon.

"The year? Oh, I see. Fiftieth year of the First Air Cycle—forty-second day of spring period. But don't worry about that.

There was a certain humorless patience about this explanation that reminded Bardon of the way grown people explain the obvious to children—or the feeble-minded.

"But what year?" persisted Bardon, desperately. "I don't understand these cycles you speak of.

The young man raised his colorless eyebrows. "Old time would reckon it as probably—let's see—two thousand and fifty-three since the birth of Christ.

He turned to talk to the two newcomers in a low voice. The taller, who wore a silver chain across his breast, looked sharply at Bardon.

"Impossible! Haven't heard of such a thing in forty years! Some stupid joke. May not be Flying Class at all. I've heard the Ground Class have been reviving the ancient intoxicants—hem! I'll talk to him."

He approached Bardon and pointed to the battered airplane.

My field regulator tells me you've been flying that. Would you mind telling me where you got it? A museum piece, perhaps?"

"Look here, Bardon snapped impatiently. "I may be dreaming or drunk, I don't know which—or fourth dimension—otherwise where would all you silk-dressed people come from? But as far as I know I'm Professor Bardon, of Calloway College, and you'll oblige me if you'll let me talk to some one in authority here. One of the head keep—"

"I'm in authority here, the silver-chained one pointed out calmly. "I'm the air chief of this zone. Have you your identity mark?"

Forget it, countered Bardon with a last effort to avoid the ghastly truth that was being forced on him. "You fellows have kidded long enough. Come on, now. I'm in a hurry I've a class waiting for me—a lecture—you can't tell me this is all those years after what I think—"

The air chief nodded. "I see. Now, if you please, will you step this way with us? You'll be quite comfortable, I assure you."

"I will not!" Bardon protested, backing away "I don't know what kind of a madhouse—

The air chief's gesture was no more than a flicker of the eyelids, but Bardon found himself gripped from behind by the two men in maroon silk. He struggled slightly, but they displayed a surprising strength.

When he attempted to shout he found a capable hand across his mouth.

Mustn't have a disturbance, the air chief said with a worried frown, as if a disturbance in that vast, ordered field were an unthinkable thing. "Look for his identity mark, M-forty!"

The man called M-forty jerked Bardon's coat and shirt aside and exposed his chest.

Then he and the air chief exchanged significant looks.

"Not Air Class evidently," the chief frowned. "The question is how did he get here? The Grounders are carefully registered as a rule and he coudn't have escaped from the night corral in that rattletrap affair. No use asking him anything, though. Bring him to the board—not the Air Traffic, but the physical in Zone 87-K. Lively now, M-forty, and you'll catch them before they adjourn today."

Bardon was hustled toward the nearest gleaming plane. He hung back, feet dragging, and then gave it up as a useless and undignified protest. Without a word the two regulators shoved him, feet foremost, inside a coffinlike space in the fuselage.

Evidently this aerial patrol wagon had been used to carry prisoners before, for Bardon's ankles and waist fitted neatly into adjustable metal straps that were quickly fastened by M-forty, securing the erstwhile Professor of Philosophy firmly

He heard the trapdoor in front slam closed and felt the machine leap straight into the air, with a snapping of sparks at the controls.

"I'll be hanged!" he muttered.

CHAPTER III

VAIN PROTESTS

THERE are some impressions too startling for an ordinary man to take in, all at once, in their entirety Bardon was an ordinary man, even if he was an associate instructor in philosophy, and, in spite of the evidence of his senses, he refused to accept the conclusion that was being forced on him—that, somehow, by some strange trick of fate he had been shot forward physically and mentally into the middle of the twenty-first century.

He argued with himself that it was impossible—argued quite plausibly and had almost convinced himself that it was, using the best logic at his command, even while he felt the dwarf plane with M-forty at the helm, hurtling him upward and forward to an unknown destination.

He fought against the metal bonds, tried to sit up and gave the job up as hopeless. He lay back breathless in the narrow space.

What kind of men inhabited this new world? What were they going to do with him?

The motion of the plane stopped with a light bump and the trapdoor at the side slid open sharply, showing M-forty's impassive pink face. He snapped open the bonds and motioned Bardon to climb out.

"Hurry, now." The maroon-clad one seemed less respectful now that it was established that Bardon did not belong to the Air Class.

Bardon crawled out. "Wait a minute," he said. "Let's get this straight. You say this is the year two thousand and fifty something. I'm not used to it yet. Went through a gray wall, you see, back there."

"All right, all right!" M-forty snapped impatiently. "Don't keep them waiting, please. Explain it to the board, not me. I'm not medical."

He grabbed Bardon's arm and jerked it smartly. The professor glowered.

"Hands off. About a century and a half ago—I mean two hours ago by my time—I'd be inclined to punch you in the nose for that."

M-forty seemed mildly surprised.

"Violence? You are certainly living in a world of your own, Grounder. Opposing a regulator! You're sick all right! Come!"

The grasp on Bardon's arm tightened.

He followed his escort, outwardly meek, but boiling with rage within. A professor of philosophy at Calloway College was not used to being treated like an escaped serf. What a race of humorless machines!

The place was similar to the landing field they had left—as orderly and silent and clean, but much larger. Instead of grass underfoot there was a smooth, glassy surface extending for half a mile to face into a distant line of gray wall that inclosed the space in a great rectangle.

Planes, that looked like dragon flies with their wings clipped, of all colors and many shapes, sped across the blue sky overhead and dropped to the surface to discharge

passengers. Close behind Bardon was an angle of the gray wall and a square doorway, in which stood several regulators in the uniform of dark red silk.

M-forty started that way. Bardon, bringing up the rear, went cautiously the first few feet as if walking on ice, but found the surface of the landing place not at all slippery. He crossed a space that was fairly transparent, and found he was gazing down a crisscross of gray metal columns and beams, to the tiny looking trees, two thousand or so feet below.

It took his breath away for a moment to find the ground he walked on was not ground at all, but a gigantic landing stage. The vastness of the engineering feat that would carry a small city up into the clouds gave him a startling perspective of the ability of these men of 2053 A. D.

As they neared the doorway the regulators stepped aside, looking curiously at Bardon.

"Sick Grounder, his escort informed them. "Mental case. Board still in session?"

They nodded and looked at Bardon again—rather grimly, he thought.

INSIDE the doorway the place widened out into a spacious low-ceilinged hall. Skylights allowed a pale, lavender light to enter from above. The floor was of the same glassy substance as the landing stage, the gray walls were unadorned, their stark lines unbroken by sign of color or life.

All in all, Bardon had never seen a place so cold and so lacking in beauty of line and form. It reminded him strongly of a windowless factory deserted of its workers.

The place was not deserted, however. Underneath the center skylight three men and one woman were seated behind a curved metal table. At first glance Bardon thought they were all men, for they were dressed alike in dull yellow silk robes and had their hair cropped close to their heads, and there was nothing but the smaller features and thinner neck to distinguish the woman from her companions.

Bardon thought she was about the ugliest woman he had ever seen.

Impassively they watched M-forty and Bardon approach.

You're late, M-forty," the woman said coldly "Air Chief Sixty-Three reported you were coming with this Grounder twenty-two minutes ago.

"I lost a minute coming through Zone 87-B on account of a large freight carrier in the lower lane. The next lane was full going east and west, and you know I couldn't leave my own lane except at the crossing point—"

"That will do. You're assigned to ground duty in Zone 59-Sea Level for a week. Another tardiness and you will find yourself before the medical board yourself for examination. Stand aside."

The four studied Bardon for a full minute without speaking.

"What's your number and zone, Grounder?" the man at the end of the circular table jerked out briskly.

Bardon shook his head.

"There's a long explanation due, I think, he said. "You people are as much in the dark as I am, I guess. First of all, I have no number and never heard of a zone until this morning. I don't belong in this new world at all. Somehow, by some odd sequence of events—Heaven knows how—I've managed to project myself forward into the next century—"

The man in yellow silk was not listening any more. He looked at his companions and significantly raised his pale eyebrows a shade

"Interesting, isn't it?" he queried. "Especially to you, A-ten. I doubt if you've seen one. Rare even among the Grounders nowadays—cerebral sickness. I thought we had bred it out pretty well. But it will happen.

The man called A-ten smiled discreetly before replying.

"I've studied it, of course. It's in First Cycle history Similar to state they arrived at by drinking fermented juices. We examined an odd case in the experimental laboratories one time.

Bardon said stubbornly, "I am Professor Bardon—I was awhile ago—living in the

twentieth century, going about my business quietly. I was driving that plane today across Long Island—"

A-ten smiled discreetly again.

"Suppose you do describe this world you've lived in? Don't get excited now Take it easy. You were flying, you say, over a long island after buying—by which you mean exchanging money for material in the ancient custom—this plane, as you call it, for a thousand of dollars. Now where did you get that clothing?"

"Bought it, naturally." Bardon shoved his hand into the coat of his flying suit and found his wallet. It had several dollars, a blank check and half a dozen of his engraved visiting cards.

The board examined these things. A-ten looked up, frowning.

"Apparently all this comes from one of the museums. There's one in Zone 87-Lake Level. The question is how did this Grounder manage to get them? But that isn't important right now We'll investigate that later. It's an extraordinary case of mental sickness."

"I tell you I'm sane!" Bardon shouted. "Can't you understand I don't belong in this age—that I'm a man thrown forward into a future age? I didn't steal these things! They belong to me! That's my name on the cards. Philip Bardon! I live—I did live at Parview Hall, Calloway College. I was born in the early 1900's—"

"All right," A-ten soothed. "We understand. You're about a century and a half old and you're not here at all, but back in the dim past. Also you didn't steal this stuff and a valuable relic, but they belong to you. In fact, you bought them some hundred and fifty years ago, and so forth."

"It's true," Barton muttered despairingly.

They paid no further attention to him. After an exchange of glances about the table, A-ten motioned to the man in maroon silk.

"Take him to Ground Chief P-fifteen, at the Grounders' Defective House. Four days' observation. Notify chief medicals if they wish to make any notes and observations. After that the ground chief will make the necessary arrangements."

"What's the idea?" Bardon looked from one to the other. "Look here—"

M-forty's strong grip propelled him to the door. Bardon twisted around toward the unsmiling, impassive faces of the members of the board.

"Come now, M-forty insisted. "Don't excite yourself. I'm sure you'll be very comfortable where you're going."

Bardon felt himself hurried out the doorway toward the regulator's ship. The professor shrugged his thin shoulders resignedly.

"Where is this place, M-forty?" he asked. "What will they do with me?"

M-forty seemed not to have heard. He opened the trapdoor and motioned to Bardon to climb in.

CHAPTER IV

THE GROUNDERS' DEFECTIVE HOUSE

BARDON thought that journey would never end. Not that it took so long in reality, but, cramped in the narrow confines of the flying dungeon, with the metal bands biting into his arms and ankles, and half stifled in the close quarters, he suffered the tortures of a man in a straitjacket.

He set his jaw grimly and bore it. It was plain that in this new age consideration for the individual was unheard of.

M-forty paid no more attention to his cargo than if Bardon was a bale of goods, numbered, and ticketed and classified and consigned to a storehouse. It was also becoming plainer every minute that as a supposed Grounder, Bardon did not figure very highly in the eyes of the Flying Class.

And they wasted no time showing it. If violence was a thing of the past so were kindliness and charity.

Bardon made up his mind that, given the opportunity, he would show these people some of the forgotten violence of his own warring age. He wondered if they had forgotten how to fight.

There did not seem to be any arms

in evidence, the regulators relying on their physical strength and their fanatical belief in the powers of laws and regulations —and indexed numbers.

Everything so far seemed to be strictly ordered. Even a man's clothing was a matter of regulation.

The ship landed again, and M-forty beckoned from the open trapdoor

"Where are we now?" Bardon questioned as he emerged into the daylight.

"Grounders Defective House The ground chief here will take care of you. Step out quickly if you please.

It was a room remarkably similar in every detail to the larger one they had left, open at the top to allow passage to and from the air lanes.

A rather oldish man, dressed in light green cotton coat and hose, closed a black box on the table before him and looked up.

"All right, M-forty You may go. I've just been talking to the board. Four days' observation and—er- the usual arrangements, I understand.

He scratched his close-shaven chin and looked under his heavy eyebrows at Bardon.

"Rather odd case. Step into the testing booth. He motioned toward an affair that reminded Bardon of a telephone booth, except for the intricate system of wire antennas and metal pads that lined it.

"What's that for?" Bardon demurred.

Wordlessly, the ground chief and M-forty grasped Bardon's arms and he found himself gently but firmly lifted into the booth in a standing position.

Ground Chief P-fifteen seemed to know his business. His hands adjusted pads and clamps nimbly on Bardon's forehead, over his heart and on the pulses of wrists and throat.

Bardon had a sensation of purple sparks shooting through every vein. After the trying ride it was rather a pleasant and soothing feeling and he forbore to struggle against the restraining hands. A slight hissing noise emanated from the sides of the booth.

P-fifteen snapped out a folding mechanism from the wall and appeared to study it. The purplish haze disappeared, and Bardon leaned against the side of the booth feeling suddenly tired and dazed.

Rather an odd case, I agree with you," M-forty said, looking over the chief's shoulder at the record. "Twenty-eight years old. Doesn't look it. I'd say fifty-eight at a guess—

You'd be wrong," interrupted Bardon with a return of spirit. "I'm twenty-eight and I don't look a day older than you for that matter

The young man grinned. "As a matter of fact, I'm fifty-five myself. The chief here is seventy-three—"

Don't argue with him, please, P-fifteen ordered harshly. "I think we may leave this matter to the medical without interfering. They'll not thank you for disturbing this subject. There'll be an inquiry ordered about this Grounder and perhaps the regulators will have some explaining to do. This Grounder has never been rejuvenated it seems, and the record shows he has had measles, scarlet fever, and frequent influenzas! Where in the world he has been hiding out to escape the laws is beyond me.

M-forty whistled softly, shook his head, and stepped into his ship.

Do you mean to say you people have none of these childhood diseases?" Bardon asked. And you've extended the period of life, too. Though Lord knows what good it does you.

"Shall I have him indexed?" M-forty called. "He seems to have forgotten his number and zone.

No need to now. You know that, P-fifteen snapped. "This way now."

Bardon went through the door designated. Inside the smaller room a table held a square metal platter of food and a stone jug of water

Eat if you are hungry, the chief ordered.

Bardon did not wait for a second invitation. He found the food satisfying and did not bother to analyze it. As far as he

could judge it was a mixture of vegetables —none of which he recognized—and nut meats. He made use of a square spoon like a tiny shovel that was beside the platter of food.

P-fifteen stepped out and returned as Bardon finished, with a shirt and trunks of dull blue cotton over his arm.

"Strip and put these on," the chief said, tossing the clothing on the floor. "There are sandals there in the corner. First we must identify you. Your right hand, please."

Bardon held forth his hand unsuspectingly, palm upward. The ground chief, who had approached from the side with his hand behind him, gripped Bardon's elbow quickly and pressed something against the professor's wrist.

A burning pain shot through his arm as he jerked it away with a sharp cry. Bardon looked at his wrist. Printed thereon in tiny dots of blue was the letter C.

Somehow the past few hours seemed to come to a head right there in Bardon's mind.

"Damn you!" he blurted out and swung viciously for the other's jaw.

P-fifteen in a long life of machine-made regulations had probably never blocked a swift uppercut. But he managed to miss part of it, getting only a graze on the chin.

He backed away, slightly paler, his fingers feeling behind him for something on the wall.

BARDON was started now and warmed up. He clenched his fist and went after the ground chief, now rapidly retreating through the doorway.

Then a door slid noiselessly ascross the opening, and Bardon found his way blocked. He realized now what the chief had been reaching for—the catch that would release the concealed door. Through a transparent panel in the door Bardon caught sight of the chief conferring with two other men—similarly dressed in green cotton, and pointing to the prisoner.

They left and Bardon examined the jail. There were four walls of the gray metal, similar to aluminum, but hard as glass, sounding hollow under Bardon's thumping fist; there was a skylight open some fifteen feet above his head; there was the table he had eaten at, a folding shelf on the wall covered with a pad—evidently meant to be his bed—there was a metal stool. That was all.

Given time and a little assistance from the outside, an active man would not fail to clear the skylight. It was not an unbreakable prison, but quite sufficient to hold Bardon for a while, until he could devise some means of scaling that tantalizing fifteen feet to where the blueness of a summer sky showed in a clear square.

But, after getting out of the place, what would the next move be? Alone in a world of indexed numbers and strange laws, where every man was known and filed for reference, Bardon, in his archaic garb would stick out like a sore thumb.

He decided to change his style of clothing at any rate. If he managed to get away it would serve to make him less conspicuous. What he was getting away from, Bardon had no idea, but he suspected it to be something unpleasant—a lunatic asylum, probably, judging from the ground chief's cool analysis.

Bardon undressed slowly and climbed into the cheap looking blue cotton tunic and short pants. Dressed in these, with the corded sandals on his feet, he felt like a sprinter waiting for the gun.

He became conscious of eyes watching him through the door panel. Two gray heads, wearing yellow skull caps, showed in the aperture, nodded to one another and apparently discussing him at length.

"Look here," he called, trying to appear as calm and sane as possible in spite of the blue Grounder's uniform, "if you are men of science in this new world, listen carefully to what I say. I am not an insane person. I have been thrown forward into your century from what you consider the past."

They looked blankly at him.

"This may be a reincarnation," Bardon went on, desperately.

"Philosophy—reincarnation. One gray head wagged at the other. "What kind of talk is that?"

"Late Ground Cycle, the other informed him. "A haphazard age without rime or reason. Where on the globe did he gather all that rot into his disordered brain? You'll note he even calls himself by that ancient and senseless form of names without birth numbers and zone. Perhaps we had better -

The other one jerked his head in affirmation and they turned away.

"Wait!" Bardon shouted. "You must give be a hearing! I'm not ins

They vanished, and he sat down heavily on the edge of the cot.

CHAPTER V

BARDON INVENTS A GAME

TOWARD evening lights were turned on —a dull glow that seemed to come from the metal of the walls themselves, illuminating the cell with a soft, shadowless radiance—and shortly after the door slid silently open.

Bardon looked up hopefully. A man entered carrying a tray with food. He was a short, bowlegged individual, dressed in the Grounder blue, muscular and harmlessly unintelligent in expression. He deposited the tray on the table and turned toward the door.

"You're also a Grounder, aren't you?" Bardon asked.

"Grounder, the man answered in a grunt. "Forty-two, Sea Level.

"Who runs the show nowadays?" Bardon persisted. "I mean who is the government—who has the say? The Air Class?"

"Air Class, the man grunted again. He seemed to have almost lost the power of speech. "No talk with the mental sick. Against the law.

"The law seems to be everything. Do you ever break it?"

"Break—law!" The man seemed struck with the novelty of the notion. "No one breaks law. Ground chief whips. Once Forty-two Sea Level found green coat of chief, put it on. Chief whips. Against law.

"Good Lord! As bad as that? This Air Class have everything their own way, it seems. But I suppose the law has them tied, too. What are they going to do to me for committing the crime of being crazy?"

"No talk with the mental sick. Against the law, the man muttered, and scurried out, slamming the door shut behind him.

Bardon grinned ruefully. Pleasant place to live in, the world of the twenty-first century! What was that speech he had made yesterday—some hundred odd years ago?

"Life comfortable and happy and joyous! A world of sunlight and freedom! The millennium—hell!"

It was plain now that, aside from his weird story, these people of the Air Cycle considered him crazy for another reason—and a stronger one. No one, it seemed, would even contemplate breaking the law that bound them mentally and physically, except an insane man. So sure were they of the sanctity of their intricate system of laws and regulations that they did not even trouble to guard him securely. The open skylight was an invitation night and day

The following two days Bardon spent in solitary quiet, except for the visits of the silent Grounder twice a day and the glimpses Bardon got of curious faces at the door panel.

Sometimes Bardon managed to get the automaton to open his mouth and talk, in spite of his evident fear of the law. Bardon had a thousand questions to ask about the new era, and since Chief P-fifteen refused to hold conversation with his insane patient Bardon fell back on the heavy-faced Forty-two Sea Level.

It was like pulling teeth to get sensible answers, for Forty-two's vocabulary consisted of about one hundred words, mostly of one syllable, and he spoke in grunts that were hardly intelligible at times. But little by little Bardon got a hazy picture of this strange world of 2053.

Forty-two had been born a Grounder.

He had no knowledge of his parents, since there was no such thing as family life nowadays, but supposed they had also been Grounders and their ancestors Grounders, living in tiny villages and toiling for the Air Class, under the supervision of Ground chiefs, who were, in turn, under the supervision of various boards, who in turn were directed by a great World Board—but Bardon had to guess that for himself. Forty-two's imagination did not get that far. Over all hovered the dark shadow of the law.

Everything was ordered by statute. No man could wear other clothing than the color designated for his class and occupation. No Grounder could venture out of his allotted zone.

Flying was an art practiced and known only to the Air Class. There were no international boundaries, no wars, no serious diseases, no savage tribes. On the other hand, there were no amusements, except flying and inventing new machines, no fine arts, no theaters, no joy of living, and no such thing as love and marriage for either Grounder or Air Class, except by decree and under the strict regulation prescribed by law.

Men and women lived apart in separate communities among the Grounders. In the Air Class both sexes ruled with equal authority, and the women were forbidden to marry.

"But how does the race keep up?" Bardon questioned. "It seems to me the Air Class would die out in a generation.

It took Forty-two a long while to understand this question. He himself was not destined to have children. Something wrong with his pedigree, Bardon gathered. The Medical Board had pronounced him unfit

But, it seemed, the matter was scientifically handled by recruiting wives from among the best of the Grounders for the Air Class. Children were brought up away from their parents in isolated communities. There were very few of these Child Zones.

The breeding out of the unfit and the abolition of free marriage had reduced the millions of the earth to mere thousands.

FORTY-TWO could not give much idea of the life or numbers of the Air Class. They lived aloft for the most part on their landing-stages, in their own towns, while the Grounders worked to raise the food and run the intricate machinery that served their masters.

Of recent history Forty-two knew next to nothing. An old man had told him once of an insurrection of Grounders in 2001 against the people of the Air, and how many Grounders had been killed and the law made more severe. The same ancient had mentioned the beginning of the Air Cycle in 1976, starting with a great war and a world movement from the east of Europe, and a great plague followed by disorder and then many laws becoming stricter all the time and a gradual building up of an Air Class.

All this took up the two days, for Forty-two became panicky occasionally when he realized he was breaking the law in talking to Bardon, and then he would scurry away and not show up until the next mealtime.

"They must be a hard-headed and cold-blooded crew, these folks of the Air Class," Bardon suggested as he tackled his third breakfast in prison. "No doubt with all their scientific achievements sickness has been pretty well done away with. I suppose I'm about the only case of—er—mental derangement they have right now."

Forty-two looked mystified.

"Don't know that talk," he muttered. "Say it again other ways."

"Have you ever seen a mental sick chap before, Forty-two?"

The man bobbed his head violently and held two fingers.

"Forty-two saw so many. In Fall Period."

Bardon was interested immediately. "What did they do with them?"

Forty-two rolled his head around and closed his eyes.

"Went asleep soon. Ground chief made them asleep nice."

An unpleasant chill wriggled along Bardon's spinal column.

"Look here, old man." He cleared his throat, swallowed and mustered up a sickly smile of encouragement. "I'm rather interested in—er—that sort of thing. Just exactly how did they go to sleep—and—did the Ground Chief make a point of waking them up again?"

The man shook his head. "No wake. Against the law for mental sick to be awake. They go asleep in Lethal House and by and by they stop breathing and Forty-two carry them out to Zone Factory—"

"Lethal House!" Bardon jumped to his feet. "Do you mean to say they intend to put me to death in some fiendish scientific way—? Just a second, Forty-two. I'll be right back. I'll just take a walk around and get the air—"

The man's muscular arm barred the way to the door.

"Against the law. He shook his head. "Ground chief says mental sick must stay here. Four days and then nice sleep in Lethal House."

"Nothing doing, Bardon insisted. "You tell your blasted Ground chief to take a nice sleep for himself. I'm through here."

Forty-two stood stubbornly in the way, shaking his head. Obviously, Bardon was no match for the dull-witted keeper if it came to a tussle. And the Ground chief, with his helpers, was probably close at hand in case of just such an emergency with condemned mental defectives.

Bardon decided against force and in favor of a subtler course. He slapped Forty-two cordially on the brawny shoulder.

Of course! What was I thinking of, Forty-two? I wouldn't think of breaking the law any more than you would. Did the Ground chief say anything about playing games?"

"Games?" Forty-two blinked his eyes. "Grounders have games only in Child Zone. Ground chief say Forty-two must put hands on your neck if you break law going through door, and squeeze your neck."

"Nice fellow, that Ground chief," Bardon muttered. "Let's not have any neck squeezing. Now, here is my idea, Forty-two. As you say, there's no law against playing games in jail. Probably they never thought of it, or they'd have put a law on that, too. I've got a great idea! We'll play a game called hide-and-seek. You stand here, and I'll go hide. Not through the doorway, of course. That would be against the law. I'll go through the skylight there."

Forty-two looked doubtful. There was a childish expectancy about his expression that seemed to Bardon to indicate an interest in this new game. But Bardon was not quite sure that it didn't indicate a tendency to put those sinewy hands on Bardon's neck and squeeze.

"You'll have to lend a hand," Bardon went on hurriedly. "It'll be lots of fun. Ancient game I'm reviving. Never heard of here, I see. Just stand there and give me a back up."

He pushed Forty-two to the center of the floor under the square of blue sky and clambered to the jailer's bent back.

"No climb on the table, old boy," Bardon called. "I'll do it once, and then will be your turn. Peach of a game."

It was quite a stunt balancing on the man's broad shoulders, but with the prospect of a quiet death in a lethal chamber awaiting him, Bardon took a chance on breaking his neck. He reached up and found his hands just missed the framework.

Bardon jumped, caught his fingers on the edge of the frame, and drew himself up over the edge.

On the spacious landing-place no one was in sight. Several empty ships stood near by.

Bardon looked over the edge at Forty-two who was picking himself up from the floor The professor held his finger to his lips.

"Now comes the fun, he whispered. "You wait there until I shout 'The wind blows east, the wind blows west, the wind blows over the cuckoo's nest. Come and find me.' Get it? Great stuff, Forty-two."

"You come back?" Forty-two asked.

"*If you don't believe me, I won't go at all.*" Bardon tried to appear resentful. "That'll spoil the game. Now you wait until you hear me. Here I go!"

He went rapidly, across the glistening landing stage toward the waiting ships.

CHAPTER VI

"CATCH HIM!"

BARDON had an idea that the whole thing had been an absurd performance for a professor of philosophy, and the infantile joy with which Forty-two Sea Level had joined in the game had been rather funny, but for all that, Bardon did not feel like stopping to laugh it out. He felt sure Ground Chief P-fifteen would not enter into the spirit of play at all. There had been something particularly unhumorous about Ground Chief P-fifteen.

Bardon was five hundred yards across the landing-stage—a small, scurrying blue figure on the broad surface—and had passed the nearest of the deserted planes and dodged a two-decker passenger ship that threatened to drop on his head and end the game of hide-and-seek right there, when he heard a shrill whistling behind him.

He did not turn his head. He knew what that meant. P-fifteen and his helpers were coming after him, and another game—the oldest in the world—was started with Bardon as the quarry.

He slid around a ship, found another, similar to the one used by the regulators, lying idle close by with the cockpit empty, and jumped nimbly aboard.

Frantically his eyes and hands sought for the means of starting the thing. There was no control-stick such as he had known in the planes of his time.

Underfoot were a couple of pedals, overhead a cylinder of black metal, and on the instrument board a green porcelain lever and a red one. They were unmarked. Alongside was a long gauge-like instrument with "Air Lanes" printed on it, and a red arrow, pointing now to "Ground Level."

Not a thing to show Bardon the most important item—how to get up into the air.

He jerked his head around to look back. Several blue-clad figures were running toward him from the Defective House. Behind them, urging them on, Bardon caught sight of the Ground chief in his light green uniform.

Bardon twisted the red lever. Nothing happened. He could hear the shouts of the pursuers coming nearer. More shrill whistling came from farther up the field. Evidently the alarm was being broadcast.

Bardon kicked the pedals and prepared to climb out and make a run for it again, hopeless of starting the plane.

Then he caught sight of Forty-two's red face coming around the edge of the neighboring plane, not ten feet away. The Grounder's muscular hands were open in front of him. He looked like a man prepared to make a low tackle, and there was an unpleasant gleam in his little eyes. Bardon knew what the hands were being held ready for.

The Grounder came on with the speed of a charging elephant, grunting angrily. Bardon looked around for a weapon, sighted the green lever on the instrument board, and ripped it loose just as the Grounder lunged forward for the final grapple.

The lever was heavy and shaped somewhat like the old-fashioned belaying-pin. Bardon swung it viciously at the cropped head—and missed as the ship swept up into the air, with a vibrant hum from the black cylinder overhead.

The ascent was so swift and unexpected that Bardon almost toppled out of his seat. The blue figures and the light green one dropped away underneath him as he recovered his balance, holding to the sides of his sky-chariot.

He glanced at the instrument board. The red arrow was moving upward along the lettered gauge marked "Air Lanes." It pointed to "Light Passenger Lane," passed it, and moved slowly toward the words "Freight and Transoceanic Lane."

Evidently the green lever, whose silvery wires were dangling brokenly from the board, had been the right one to pull to go up. Bardon argued logically that the red lever must mean to come down. But he forebore to experiment right then. He was going straight up, and that was sufficient.

He looked over the side. The landing-stage was at least five thousand feet below him now—gleaming, smooth square, like many other tiny squares that showed far and near, scattered across the green countryside.

Ships moved swiftly along the lane he had just left. He saw something glisten as it took the air from the Defective House, but could not make out whether or not it was a regulator-plane at that distance.

A sharp rattling sound, like the buzz of an alarm clock but many times louder, came from above and to the rear.

Bardon looked up. A heavy freighter, windowless with a pointed gondola in front, was surging toward him. For a moment Bardon thought he was being pursued, but the steady, businesslike passage of the freighter, slower than the flight of the regulator-planes, reassured him.

Going upward through the Freight Lane at right angles to the other ship's course, Bardon hoped to clear it. Otherwise there would be a serious collision, and his light plane would suffer more than the big one. At the rate of speed both travelled Bardon was going to be right in the way.

The freighter's rattle sounded again warningly, then the big ship dipped slightly and Bardon shot from beneath in front of it and above just in time. He caught a glimpse of a frowning face in the gondola, and in that fleeting instant wondered what the freighter pilot must have thought of the foolish fellow who was inviting a sudden death.

AFTER that Bardon had no time to think of anything much. He was too busy. He had reached the point where traffic was heavy. Ships drove past him above and below in endless succession. Once, one—a bigger ship than the first freighter—sped by Bardon so closely that the metal sides almost grazed.

Faces lined the rail of the upper deck. They appeared in a white streak, and disappeared, and Bardon's frail craft tossed crazily in the air currents the giant plane left in its wake.

It righted of itself with a loud hum from the black cylinder, just as two more smaller ships rushed by, one on either side. The ship on the right veered off sharply, disclosing a third small freighter that bore down on Bardon with the speed of a cyclone.

IT WAS impossible to avoid all the traffic that filled the air lane even if Bardon had control of his own ship. The freighter, whizzing beneath him, struck the fuselage in the rear, tipping the little plane up at a dangerous angle, and sending Bardon, scrambling for a hold, up against the instrument board.

For a moment he rocked dizzily, then, as the ship righted itself and swung in a huge circle, he wrenched at the red lever.

He hung suspended just long enough to kick the nearest foot-pedal, then plunged downward again through the traffic of the lane. This time, with the aid of the foot-pedal, he straightened out slightly on a lateral course, descending in a long, fast glide that would bring him farther away from the Defective House.

Prolonged whistling shrilled in his ears. He passed a regulator's ship in mid-lane. Another one appeared from behind a freighter and raced toward him, and still another dropped down in his direction from a higher lane.

Bardon did not stop to inquire whether they were after him for breach of traffic laws or on account of a general alarm sent out. He tugged at the red lever and his speed downward increased suddenly and terrifically.

Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed the gondola of a freighter, an excited face at the pilot window.

The next thing he knew he was upside down, holding with a desperate grip to the side of his plane, and falling in sickening curves to the tree tops far below.

Above him the freighter, canting over at an extreme angle, had stopped as if badly injured by the terrible collision.

Bardon's ship began to do some startling stunts on the way down. Once it looped, sending traffic scurrying right and left to get out of the way. Then it rolled over twice, did a falling leaf, a barrel roll, and went into a tail spin.

Coming out of that close to the ground, it drove ahead for a quarter of a mile in a straight line, smashing into the nearest regulator and sending his ship in a series of somersaults into the fast nearing tree tops.

Then, without warning, the ride ended. Bardon saw the branches of the trees right beneath, not twenty feet away, and saw them again ten feet away, and heard the crashing of metal against wood as he reached them.

He sailed from the cockpit in a graceful curve, landing in a thick bush that broke his fall at the expense of scratches and torn clothing.

He picked himself up, wriggled free of the twigs that held his blue tunic in a tangled embrace, and left part of the tunic in shreds behind him. There was no time for recovery of breath or attire, with that warning whistle sounding from above the tree tops.

There was a faint path outlined through the woods. Bardon took it on the run. Panting, perspiring, he kept on, putting as much distance as possible between him and his pursuers. He knew this time he had the advantage in the woods, since he was concealed from view and they would have to land carefully to avoid the trees that were thickly clumped.

Around a turn Bardon stumbled and found himself face to face with a girl –an exceptionally pretty girl in a white gown, looped at the waist, and little metal sandals.

CHAPTER VII

OCEANIA

THE girl had been bending over a flower-bed in the little clearing, but straightened up, her eyes—quite a rare and delightful combination of gray fringed with black—opening widely at sight of Bardon. He became acutely conscious of his need of a shave and a new tunic.

"Excuse me," he gasped. "Didn't mean to frighten you. Running, you see. In rather a hurry."

She smiled—the first beautiful thing Bardon had encountered in his new world. "I see you were running," she said. "Was that why the regulators were sounding the alarm?"

"Yes." Bardon leaned against a tree trunk and got back his breath by degrees. "Fact is, they were after me. I escaped from the Mental Defective House back there, got snarled up in traffic, and—but I can't stay here! They'll be along any minute."

"They won't come here." She shook her head reassuringly. "Any regulator—or any other man, for that matter—found within half a mile of this place would shortly find himself in Lethal House with the men in black arranging his sleeping-gas for him.

It was Lethal House I was getting away from. They had me dated up with the executioner."

She shivered slightly. "It's the law for those below mental standard. You—you don't look like a mental defective."

I'm not!" Bardon asserted stoutly. "I can pass any mental test they could give me. But they won't listen to me. Because I can't prove my story and it doesn't jibe with their unimaginative, card-indexed systematic ideas, they claim I'm an escaped nut. I don't know how I came here. I'm Professor Bardon, of Calloway College, and I was driving a plane I bought for a thousand dollars—"

"Won't you sit down?" she interrupted gently. "You look awfully tired."

"You see, I don't belong in this century

at all, Bardon finished lamely. It's rather hard to explain in so many words.

He slumped to the ground, his back against the tree trunk, and she poised as lightly on her little sandals as a wood-nymph, looked at him with eyes that were calmly speculative and unafraid.

"I don't altogether understand," she prompted. "What century do you claim to belong in? Past or future?"

Past. Bardon frowned. "You'll get a laugh out of this like the rest, I suppose. My last recollection is piloting a plane in 1940. I went through a gray wall of some kind, and—here I am in 2053 with no idea how I came here or how to explain it.

"Of course, I may be all wrong about it. I might have been born right here in this century, and what I think was my former life is all a dream—some kind of atavistic mental disturbance. In that case they're right and I'm mentally cuckoo. But I think I really did live in the twentieth century. Something—the cog slipped somewhere in the time machine, and time stopped for me, or I bumped into the fourth dimension—and here I am, a man without a century and about as popular as a water-bug in the breakfast food."

"But how in the world *could* you have stumbled in this way?" she breathed, squatting down on her heels and cupping her chin in her palms the better to study him. "You certainly talk sensibly enough about it. And it's perfectly astounding!"

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I don't know how it happened. But it's true nevertheless. You're the first person I've found ready to listen to me. I'm supposed to be an ignorant Grounder here. But I can describe the period I lived in down to the slightest detail. How could that be if I hadn't lived then?

"Of course! Men are awfully stupid, especially about their laws. I think it's fearfully thrilling, the whole thing. I've read in the histories about the old days—the Violent Cycle, we call it. They tell us it was so much worse than this cycle. Sometimes I wonder. It seems so romantic to me—that ancient period—"

She looked off into the gloom of the trees.

"You believe me, then!" Bardon exclaimed hopefully.

Yes. She nodded slowly, looking directly at him. I don't know why I believe you. It seems an inconceivable thing to grasp. But I do. You are safe here with me, and you can talk while you rest. Tell me about your cycle, Bar— What was it you called yourself? It wasn't a number."

Bardon. But that was what we called a family name. He blushed guiltily. "Philip is what—my best friends call me. Phil sounds better—more—er—intimate. May I ask what they call you? But perhaps you'd better not tell me. I detest their darned numbers."

She shook her head until the short curls tossed gayly.

"I haven't a number, either, Phil," she laughed. "That's not for—for the Maternal Zones. They allow us names, you see, and sometimes prettier things than the real Grounders. My name is registered as Zero-four, Mountain Level, but I'm called Oceania, after one of the ancient places, and perhaps because my eyes are gray."

"OCEANIA, Bardon murmured. "It not lovely enough for you by far. It should be Rose Dawn or Pale-Moon-of-the-Sea, or—"

He stopped suddenly as her hand rested lightly on his.

I love to hear you say such things to me, she smiled. "No one talks that way, it seems. It sounds like the old words in the histories when there were lovers and all that. Perhaps we'll be lovers, Phil, too—"

"Wait a minute, Oceania. He struggled for a suitable form of words. "I feel like the serpent in the Garden of Ed—well, not exactly that. But you're—er—rather unsophisticated, Oceania, to tell the truth, and there's a whole lot you don't know."

"Well, go on. She seated herself comfortably and sighed. "Tell me about your

cycle. I'm sorry I spoke of that love business. Perhaps you're prejudiced against that sort of thing. Falling in love and kissing and marrying the way people used to. I won't mention it again.

"Oh, well, I wouldn't say that exactly," Bardon amended hastily. "The thought of love is not precisely abhorrent to me, but I'll tell you something about my time if you're really interested.

"Immensely. What did the women do and wear, and were they really as free as men to do what they wanted? Start with that first, Phil."

Bardon began with that, as directed. He had a good grasp of the political and social aspects of the woman question of the nineteen hundreds. He had delivered several lectures on it in his time, so he was prepared to go into the matter at length.

He described the women of his day, their dress, their households, their daily programs, their position in the world of business and politics and society, their looks, their ways of arranging their hair, their aids to beauty. And, with an appreciative glance at Oceania's unspoiled, unaided loveliness, his own preferences for old-fashioned girls.

He discussed college girls and cosmetics, condemned divorce and went into the history of the feminist movement of the twentieth century.

Bardon liked to talk. He especially liked an appreciative audience, and although some of his ancient expressions were beyond Oceania, she listened with bated breath.

Bardon almost forgot the menace of Lethal House and lurking regulators. Presently he was on his feet lecturing as if he had a class before him.

He was still answering questions two hours later, when he realized that it was growing dark.

He stopped, and Oceania jumped nimbly to her feet.

"Oh, I had no idea!" she exclaimed. It must be close to eighteen hours! They'll come looking for me! And they'll find you!"

"Who?" Bardon leaned against the tree, suddenly tired again.

"The Zone Matrons. They might think I was lost. Otherwise you are perfectly safe. You see, there are no regulators here. It is considered safe for us because the walls keep out the Grounders, and no Air Class would dare to land here under any conditions. You can sleep here, and in the morning I'll get away early and bring your food.

Bardon detained her as she was about to vanish into the shadow of the pathway.

I still don't get it," he said. "What zone is this? Why is no one allowed to enter here?"

She paused silently a moment. Her face was hidden from him in the growing darkness.

I forgot you didn't know, Phil. The world has changed terrifically from your time. The Air Class women do not bear children. They are too busy, and too masculine. Children are brought up in Child Zones and, if they pass the standards, go into the Air Class. The remainder go into the Grounders as laborers and agriculturalists and for heavy work generally. The highest grade of girl infants are set apart in Maternal Zones, as I am. This is a Maternal Zone—there are twenty of them in existence. They furnish the wives for the Air Class. These things are strictly regulated by law. Until we are assigned, no man may venture near us nor into this zone.

Bardon shivered. You mean, you're to be made—

"I shall be assigned shortly to one of the Air Class as a wife—only that old-fashioned term has been discontinued. We are called Marital Associates now. I don't know who it will be. I haven't been informed yet by the Maternal Zone Board. But I think it will be P-fifteen, the Ground Chief of Defective House. His application, I understand, is on file. But I am not supposed to know. It may be some one else—"

"P-fifteen!" Bardon choked. "That old goat! It's outrageous!"

"It is the law, she murmured. I must be resigned to it. It is the law

"Damn the law!" Bardon exploded. "Oceania—

She vanished swiftly between the trees.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FREEMEN

SPENDING the night under a wide-spreading maple, Bardon found something to be thankful for in this new era—there were no mosquitoes. He listened fearfully for the dreaded hum that would foretell an attack on his unprotected chest and shoulders, and pillowed his head on his arm.

"Good drainage, he muttered sleepily 'Sanitation, regulation is the keynote. Glad they've made the mosquito extinct, anyway, but they've sanitated all the joy out of life, too. Oceania. Never thought it such a pretty name before

He awoke in the stillness of the moon-flooded clearing, to find some one bending over him.

Bardon jumped to his feet, awake in an instant and ready to run A muscular hand gripped his arm and stopped him, and Bardon felt he could as easily break a ten-inch hawser as that sinewy grip.

He twisted around to face his captor, a heavy-jawed, keen-eyed Grounder.

The man looked into Bardon's face in prolonged scrutiny. Bardon sensed that this was no dull-witted Forty-two.

"What do you want?" He searched the clearing for a rock or club to use as a weapon.

"You. The man answered

"Darned if I'll go without a battle. You might as well kill

"Wait. It will be explained. We are not going to kill you. Come

He tugged meaningly at Bardon's arm. "They are waiting now

"Who's waiting, and who the deuce are you, coming in here so coolly? I thought this zone was barred to men.

"It is, the Grounder muttered contemptuously, "for those who fear the law. We fear nothing. We hope for nothing. I was sent for you. We heard of you. We need you. Stay and let the regulators drag you to Lethal House, or come and help us against the Air Class. We waste time."

A revolutionary society!" Bardon exclaimed. "Lead on, Macduff!"

"Seven-twelve, the Grounder corrected solemnly, and released Bardon's arm. He turned away, motioning Bardon to follow.

They went along the path, skirted a low flower-garlanded house that Bardon figured was Oceania's abode, and struck out into the thickest of woods. Behind Seven-twelve Bardon stumbled along, through brambles and underbrush, up hill and down, through swamp and clearing.

Bardon was about to plead for a rest, when Seven-twelve stopped and indicated that Bardon was to get down. He did so, and the Grounder crawled away into the darkness.

He was back almost immediately.

"This is the wall of the Maternal Zone," he whispered. "It is an invisible wall—a belt of electrically charged ground three hundred yards wide, controlled from the Zone Factory from sunset to sunrise. It is off now for ten minutes, thanks to one of our people in the factory Hurry.

Bardon hurried. Crossing that three hundred yards of instant death with the possibility of receiving a sudden radioed jolt at any moment, he wasted no time. There was always the chance that Seven-twelve and his friend had their time mixed.

Bardon was still going strong long after he needed to, and pressing close on Seven-twelve's heels. The Grounder slowed up.

"You're making too much noise," he muttered. More carefully now and slowly We're well out of the death belt.

"Oh, are we?" Bardon breathed thankfully I wasn't sure. It's the sort of thing one wants to give a wide margin to. How much farther?"

"Into the next zone.

THE path grew rougher. Boulders had to be circled, detours made around thickets, time had to be lost while Bardon

lay panting on the ground, and Seven-twelve, as fresh as when he started, waited impatiently to go ahead.

Dawn was not far off, and Bardon calculated they had covered at least fifteen miles of rough country

The edge of the woods seemed to fall away in a precipice, opening on a yawning blackness. A weed-grown desolation, with the smell of stagnant water, and a litter of crumbling stone all about covered with grass and bushes, indicated to Bardon what the place was—an ancient and disused quarry

There was something appalling to Bardon about the thought of that quarry—discovered and exploited, perhaps, and fallen into neglect in the long time since he had flown that new ship toward Calloway College that bright morning.

Where were the men he had known, the cities of his time? The very graves of his friends were obliterated.

His own grave—

He shook his head firmly These weren t thoughts for the chill of dawn while clambering down several hundred feet of cliff wall. Seven-twelve cautioned him to hold hands, obviously not trusting Bardon's ability to make the perilous descent Bardon was glad to avail himself of the aid.

There were bushes to cling to and ledges to rest on On one of these Seven-twelve stopped and pushed Bardon before him into a wide crevice in the rock. Bardon wriggled through between the rough surfaces, turned a corner, and light blazed on him.

It was a kind of cavern, hollowed out by the hands of workmen in olden days in search of the granite veins, and was big enough to house an army A light like an old-fashioned arc lamp sputtered high in the vaulted ceiling of the place disclosing a group of twenty or thirty blue-clad Grounders, seated on granite blocks in a half circle about a central figure. An old bowed figure in coarse, brown cotton. A man so bent and seamed and wrinkled with years that he reminded Bardon strongly of an animated mummy.

But the voice that came from the decrepit figure was resonant enough.

"Come closer, friend."

Bardon complied.

"You have told him something of us, Seven-twelve?"

"Something, master. Seven twelve answered respectfully. "Not all.

"Listen carefully, then. The master spoke directly to Bardon. "I must be brief, for the time is short now. You see here the inner circle of the Freemen, an organization whose existence the Air Class does not even suspect. They thought they had stamped us out after the insurrection of 2001 A.D. I fought them then, and am still alive, and master, as my father was master in his day

"We remember the traditions of a better age—the era they call the Cycle of Violence. They have forgotten it. They have made it a world of cruelty, barren of joy, stripped of beauty and happiness. They have crushed the individual without exalting the state They have taken away everything from us but the right to die. We are abou to use that privilege in our own way in another attempt to restore right and justice and humanity to a suffering world. Their order shall become chaos, but out of that will evolve a new order."

A murmur of growling applause arose from the half circle Bardon looked around at the determined faces under the flickering light.

You've got quite a job ahead of you, he began "how many—"

The old man's hand was upraised for silence.

Hear me out. The Freemen is an older organization than the Air Class themselves. W number thousands. They number hundreds. We have been planning for fifty years. It will be a costly victory, but we will win! We have need of your help. Flying has been barred to the Grounder Class for generations. You can fly.

"When is the uprising set for?" asked Bardon, his pulses beating faster. "I also owe a debt to the Air Class."

"The time was set for the Fall Period

of this year. But now we have pushed it forward on your account. We attack the Air Cities in two days—time enough for you to train a few of our younger men. The ships will be available when you are ready

Bardon studied the eager faces around him. There was little thought in his mind of hesitation. It was a poor choice, joining this evidently doomed enterprise or death in the Lethal House. And at least he would die fighting.

He held out his hand to seal the contract.

"I'm willing. We'll all go together

The old man smiled quietly You are not optimistic. But we are better prepared than you suspect. You had better rest now. There is plenty of work ahead.

CHAPTER IX

BARDON PREPARES FOR BATTLE

BARDON became more optimistic during the succeeding two days of strenuous activity He was amazed at the strength and wide-spread influence of the Freemen. Not all were like the master, but, on the other hand, not many were as dull-witted as Bardon's first acquaintance, Forty-two, Sea Level.

These were hand-picked men, chosen and trained under the eye of the master himself, of all occupations and of equal degree of servitude.

There were blue-clad Grounders from far-away zones under the equator, men from zones twenty and twenty-one near the Arctic Circle, heavy-handed laborers from the Food Zones, deft-fingered serfs from the aircraft factories, men from the central power factories that supplied, under the whips of the regulators, light and heat and comfort to their masters in the Air Cities that most of the Grounders had never seen.

But they were alike in one respect—in their stern, sober devotion to the work under way, and in the hope that glowed in their eyes now that the day was approaching that would justify years of waiting.

They reported to the master in the cavernous quarry in a steady stream night and day advising him of the readiness of their native zones, in defiance of the law that forbade a Grounder free movement, and the meetings adjourned in prayer in violation of the law of 2018, that had abolished religious beliefs.

Bardon spent but little time in the meeting place. He had other work to do. He had a more exact knowledge of the weapons used during the Violent Cycle he had been born in. Weapons that had grown obsolete and had been forgotten for a hundred years. And he was able to improve on the clumsy home-made aerial bombs and guns secretly manufactured by the Freemen.

In a vast storehouse hollowed out of the bowels of the granite mountain he was shown piles of these small-bore guns, made after the fashion of ancient match-locks, metal containers heaped to the roof, full of a nitric acid explosive, and, most important to him of all, several hundred tiny regulator planes, row after row of them side by side and all ready to fly.

"Our men made these, the master informed him, hobbling along between the planes. "They are the only trained workers—the Grounders. The people of the air make nothing, consume everything. These planes were gathered here bit by bit from the factories and assembled for the great day We have many storehouses, but this is the only one with planes. Please Heaven, we shall put them to good use

"They don't require much experience to operate—not like our old-time airplanes," Bardon observed. A child could manipulate one of these with the simplest directions.

"True, the old man nodded. "But the young men assigned to fly have no experience in the air No Grounder is ever permitted to fly or enter a ship. They will need a leader to inspire confidence and to direct the attack. That is your part, and perhaps the most important item of the whole affair.

"I see. Bardon pointed to the aerial bombs. "We are to drop these, I suppose. But haven't the regulators and the air chiefs offensive weapons of any kind?

The master smiled. "That is their weakness. They rely on their only defense—the death belts as they call them, a circle of electrically charged ground and air about the foundations of their cities. But the factories that make that radio current and send it out to the death belts will be deserted or in the hands of our Freemen when the moment comes to attack. Here, I shall outline it to you as briefly as possible."

HE LED the way into the meeting cavern and spread a map on the table under the light It showed an outline of the Atlantic Coast as Bardon remembered it from his time, and the Great Lakes and various mountain ranges were the same, but there were blank spaces where cities had been, and red circles dotted the map in even succession. Arrows pointed in every direction in apparent confusion.

"This is a map from one of their freighters, the master explained. "The arrows indicate the air currents as you might guess. The red circles are the Air Cities. Here is Zone Eighty-Seven—Sea Level, and in the center their largest Air City, Celestia. You were there when you were taken before the board. Celestia will be our main point of attack. At the moment when the death belts are suspended all over the world our armies, led by Freemen, will batter down the foundations of the landing stages and storm the cities.

"Celestia, because it is the most important of them all, and because our guns can make little impression on the framework of the foundations, you must attack by air and give our men time to reach the top. Celestia is two thousand feet above the earth—two thousand feet of metal columns and girders, some of them ten feet of solid lunar metal.

"Good Lord! It will take you hours to climb that, if your men can do it at all. I saw that foundation structure."

The old man shook his head.

"Half an hour will do it. We have made provision for that, using the supply elevators that connect with the ground. If you can keep them busy up above for half an hour—"

Bardon's mouth tightened grimly. "I'll keep them busy all right. I only hope this fellow P-fifteen, of the Defective House, gets beneath my bomb carrier

"You mean the Ground Chief?" the master frowned. "I hope you are not thinking of personal grudges, Bardon. This is a great cause you are enlisted in."

"Oh, no. Just a random thought. I was really thinking of a girl I met recently. A rather—er—nice girl that's caught in their darned squirrel cage of laws and regulations.

The old man's frown softened wistfully.

"Love, too, will come into its own again, after this, he murmured. "Don't forget we are fighting for that also. There was a girl once, years ago—I was young too and dreamed of freedom and the woman of my heart's choice—well, no matter."

He rolled up the map and handed it to Bardon

"Study it carefully It will still be dark when we advance against Celestia and you will need to know your ground thoroughly. I will be busy from now on and will be with the ground party in the battle. If I do not find time to see you again before you start—

Their hands met in warm clasp across the table.

Occasionally, even during the most crowded hours of the next thirty-six, Bardon found time to think of Oceania. Rather the thought of Oceania and the picture of a delightful combination of gray eyes fringed with black, would intrude on the most crowded hour whether Bardon had time to day-dream or not.

He worried a little about her, too. Though the Maternal Zone was not in the immediate vicinity of the battlefield, still it was not far away and even the master's assurances that only the Air Class would suffer, did not satisfy Bardon that the

Grounders, carried away by victory or furious in defeat, might not swarm through the forbidden zone destroying everything in their path that smacked of the hated law-making Airmen.

Oceania occupied a great deal more of his mind than any woman he had met in his own age. There was a certain way she had of smiling -a quick lifting of the penciled eyebrows, a widening of the dark fringed eyes.

He was dreaming of her—a pleasant dream of a three-room apartment in College Arms, with Oceania Bardon across the breakfast table from him—when the warning hand of a messenger in blue Grounder cotton shook him into wakefulness.

"It's the time, the man announced. "Get ready The ground army has already started for Celestia.

Bardon shivered in the cold night air as he jumped to his feet. His men were wheeling out the regulator planes into the open air.

CHAPTER X

"ON TO CELESTIA"

BARDON pushed the plane he had chosen for his own along the dirt floor of the cave and out through the rocky opening.

Outside in the depth of the quarry it was dark, except for the infrequent light from the hastily-rigged bulbs on the granite face, but the dawn was not far off. The place was crowded with regulator planes, their short wings almost touching, and each small ship, with its pilot in blue, standing ready alongside.

Bardon adjusted the two heavy bombs underneath the fusilage so that they could be released readily, and called the lieutenants he had appointed the day before -the keenest of the young Grounders—for final instructions.

There were three of these sub-leaders, each in command of fifty planes, each sub-leader carrying a red magnesium flare on the tail of his plane to show the way. The rank and file of the bomb-carriers showed green flares to avoid bumping into one another in the darkness. Spread out across the cluttered ground they looked like a swarm of resting fireflies.

We must avoid confusion first of all, Bardon instructed his leader. "I will take off first straight up to twenty-five hundred feet with my fifty You, Two-thirty, will see that my men take off at five-second intervals to follow me. We will move off to the front and wait when we reach our height. Ninety-six here will start next and form up behind me, as I told you yesterday ten planes abreast in line, and your squadron, Three-six, behind his. Don't forget to wait for my first bomb before starting to drop yours.

"Having passed Celestia we will return over the same track, dropping our remaining bombs and immediately land to help the ground party If you meet any freighters or passenger ships in the lower lanes the men detailed for that work will run

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YOU BET! THAT LITTLE 20-FREE SHAVE SAMPLE SOLD ME FOR LIFE!
WHAT LATHER! EVEN A USED BLADE WIPES MY WIRY BEARD AWAY NOW!- AND THERE ARE 24 QTS. OF LATHER IN THE REGULAR TUBE—
SEEMS TO GIVE YOU A SWELL, CLOSE SHAVE TOO-GUESS I'LL TRY IT!
THAT CREAM'S TOPS! SO COOL IT EVEN HAS THOSE TENDER-SKINNED SOUR-PUSSES AT THE CLUB SMILING FOR A CHANGE!
TELL 'EM ABOUT THE BRUSHLESS TOO- IT'S A MONEY!
TWO WEEKS LATER

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alongside them and go aboard, taking charge and landing the ships.

A small ship dropped like a plummet through the darkness and poised over Bardons' head. An arm waved to him.

"The master sent me to hurry you along," the messenger called. "He's almost beneath Celestia now.

Bardon breathed deeply. "Good. Let's go!"

He stepped into his cockpit, looked to see that his wings were clear of the neighboring planes and pulled out the green lever. The cylinder hummed loudly above his head and he shot up into the air. He pushed the lever back slowly in place when the indicator showed "Passenger Level" and moved forward a few hundred yards and waited.

It was a weird feeling for a twentieth century flyer—to poise motionless except for the drift from the night wind, twenty-five hundred feet in the air, as quietly as a rowboat on a calm sea.

Below him the green lights of the Grounders' planes showed in a broad patch against the blackness. One by one they shot up into the air, forming behind him ten abreast, a column of planes.

He waited impatiently for the last green light to leave the ground and for the prearranged signal, a blaze of white flame from the cave mouth, that would tell him two hundred were in the air.

Finally it came. Bardon, with a glance at the dimly-lit instrument board before him, set out eastward.

The assault was on. Far off on the horizon, a spot of luminous silver, were the lights of the great Air City, Celestia.

His flying legion were strung out behind him. The hum of their planes—so different from the roar of a twentieth-century engine—came to him like the droning of an army of bees on the wing.

Once he heard a slithering crash in the ranks and looked back to see two green lights go whirling downward to destruction. Even with the simplest of aircraft there were bound to be collisions between the inexperienced pilots.

Celestia grew brighter in front. Bardon mounted higher into the air—up to the "Light Freight Level"—so that there would not be any danger to themselves from the exploding bombs.

The ordered squares of glistening metal came into view. Bardon steered toward the center of the Air City, where the vast Central House was, the main point of attack.

It was there that the all powerful Central Board lived and directed the destinies of the world.

He could see some activity there. The broad landing place in the center of the group of buildings was alive with people. As he watched he saw half a dozen regulator planes shoot up into the air.

Then, far below, at the foot of the city foundations, he saw the flash of guns and then heard the steady crashing and the faint roar of thousands of voices, that told him the battle had begun in earnest, that the Grounders were pouring into the deathbelt to capture the elevators.

He turned quickly, then, to the business at hand.

WHATEVER might have been the intentions of the half dozen regulators who came up to meet the advancing air horde, whether to investigate or repel the attack, the result was immediate. Enraged at the sight of their cruelest enemies, a score of Grounders broke from the formation without word of command and hurled themselves recklessly at the regulators. They crashed together one by one and disappeared underneath the moving squadrons.

Over the Central House, Bardon tugged at the spring that held one of his two bombs. The ship danced lightly when the weight was released, then spun violently as the exploding bomb tore the air to fragments beneath him.

From behind him bomb after bomb whistled downward to crash on rooftop and landing place. Shouts and screams arose from the Air City and were drowned in the steady thunder of high explosive.

At the head of his column of planes, Bardon swept on across the city and turned in a great circle, heading back.

The Air City was dark now, except for the flash of the bombs. Evidently the Board, in a desperate effort to avoid complete destruction, had thrown off the lighting system.

Bardon knew there were a few small-bore rifles of lunar metal among the regulators, used to bring down Grounders who from time to time broke through the zone lines. He heard some of these rifles going into action on his left in a quick fusillade.

A group of regulator planes, the pilots showing the familiar maroon uniform, appeared from that direction out of the darkness. Headed by an Air Chief, they plunged into the midst of the attacking force and were swallowed up immediately.

One of them, swooping down upon Bardon, thrust the muzzle of a lunar metal rifle almost into Bardon's face. Before the regulator had time to fire a Grounder's ship rammed the regulator's plane in the center and both disappeared.

Bardon was over the center of the city again now. He released his second missile. In the flash of its bursting he caught sight of the vast landing place, littered with figures in Grounder-blue and the dark red silk of the regulators among the crumpled planes.

He swung upward and waited while his men passed beneath, their dropping bombs lighting up the night in a flickering roar.

Then, as suddenly as it started, the bombardment stopped. It would be time for the master and his ground party to reach the Air City.

Bardon frowned over the side of his ship, hoping nothing had gone wrong with the elevators. It might have occurred to the air people to cut off the power running these when they threw off the lights. It seemed ages instead of seconds to Bardon.

What if the death-belt had not really been suspended?

The broad landing place a thousand feet below him glowed brightly as the lights went on again. Figures in maroon and yellow were running about like ants whose hills had been disturbed. Ships of all kinds were being filled with a panicky throng in futile effort to escape from the doomed city. Out from the entrances to the supply elevators, carrying everything before them in a blue flood, came the hordes of Grounders. Bardon could hear their shouting voices in a deafening, menacing roar of victory.

On every side his men were dropping swiftly to the landing place. He reached for the red lever before him, waiting a moment for the planes beneath to get clear before he descended.

Out of the blackness above him a freighter appeared dropping slowly toward the landing place, now filled with the blue army that was pouring through the city.

Bardon had no time to avoid the collision and the pilot of the freighter, who had probably come from a zone across the sea, seemed to have lost his head completely at the sight of the Grounders in possession of Celestia. The freighter was swinging in a huge circle and slowing up, canted over partly so that the railing and open trapdoor were beneath. The pilot window was deserted.

Even a slow descent was sufficient, though, to send Bardon head over heels from his cockpit with the impact of the heavy ship against his tiny craft. He pulled sharply at the lever, felt himself start downward, and then the metal side of the freighter crashed into the cylinder above Bardon's head.

He grasped the railing of the freighter deck just in the nick of time. His plane whirled out of sight, and he hung suspended in mid-air.

He held on with every ounce of strength while the freighter returned to an even keel, and then flung himself over the rail. It took him a second or two to recover his wits after the scare, and in that second or two the pilot appeared in the doorway and grappled with Bardon, bending him backward in an effort to throw him over the side.

He was a bigger man than Bardon, and active. He must have concluded that his

case was hopeless if taken prisoner by the Grounders, to allow his ship to careen downward and forward out of control that way.

Bardon fought to release the sinewy grip on his throat, struck at the face that gleamed above him, even while he saw, with his head twisted backward, the gray metal wall of the Central House show up directly in front of the rushing freighter.

CHAPTER XI

PROFESSOR BARDON HAS A RELAPSE

ASSOCIATE Professor Bardon wriggled his neck around carefully to make sure he was still intact and blinked at the worried face of Alpheus Corr.

All right now, are you?" Corr asked. "Had a rather difficult time with you just then. But I guess you're back to normalcy again. Feel all right?"

Bardon sat up, felt the bandage on his forehead and looked around at the familiar furniture of his room at College Arms.

"I'm a bit hazy, he muttered. "That fight I had with the pilot of the freighter—over Celestia—"

Alpheus Corr's worried frown returned. "Now look here, Phil, snap out of it. We don't want the doctor in again. He needs some sleep after your monkey shines last night. If you think you were fighting over Celestia, whoever she may be

"What happened?" Bardon asked feebly

"Last night? Why, you climbed out onto the roof shouting Down with Celestia or something and we got you back in bed again. You pretty nearly scared the life out of a co-ed who lives in the house next door shouting that you wanted to kill some bird name P-sixteen!"

"P-fifteen, Bardon corrected. "You don't understand. I went through a kind of gray wall—

"A very solid concrete gray wall, Corr grinned. "In fact the wall of the local power house. And you didn't go through. You stopped part way Not much damage except to your plane. I believe there are a couple of cylinders still intact, and I wouldn't be surprised if you could get enough out of the wreck to make a fair motor cycle."

"There—there was a girl— Bardon reached for a glass of water. "You know—it seems funny—I'm not so glad I'm back to my senses. I was in love with her, Corr—in 2053 A. D. I'm in love with her now. Darned nonsense you'll probably think—"

Phew! You take the prize, that's what I think. I've heard of constancy in love. But a man who can be true to a girl for a hundred and fif—

Bardon was not listening.

A girl stood in the open doorway, a girl with yellow hair and gray eyes, fringed with black—a rare and delightful combination—and she held a notebook under her arm.

I thought I'd find out how he was," she began. "I see—"

"Oceania!" Bardon got to his feet. He felt weak and happy and disturbed all in

one. "Oceania!" he repeated happily

"Don't mind him, Miss O'Shannon," Corr said, and looked reprovingly at Bardon. "Don't start that again, Phil. You really owe this young lady an apology for climbing in her window and half talking her to death with some ridiculous rigmarole of your own last night."

"I don't mind," she smiled

Corr looked at his watch and jumped up. "I'm late now for the class."

He hurried out. Bardon cleared his throat.

"I—er—I suppose I was pretty foolish." He looked out of the window. "Got a crack on the head when I crashed. I—er—talked a lot of nonsense I presume."

"Yes." She looked out of the window, too, looked at the bookshelves and at the rug on the floor—most particularly not at Bardon. The gray eyes seemed wistful. "Yes. You talked a lot of nonsense, about love, and the kind of a girl a man wanted to marry I think my class must be—"

"Did I?" he exclaimed eagerly. "Wait. Don't go! I say, Oceania —"

"Doris."

"Doris! You know, Doris, you might have thought I was altogether out of my head—delirious. Well, I wasn't—er—altogether—"

She smiled at him again from the doorway "Really?"

"Say, Ocean—er—Doris, you rather liked my talk on the woman question you said. If you are not doing anything tonight. I feel so much better already I'd like to continue our—er—discussion and go into the question of woman's place in the home, in a general way, with—er—perhaps a particular application—"

"I'd love to, Phil," she murmured, and vanished down the stairs.

Associate Professor Bardon picked up a neat manuscript from the table and read the title: "Our Aerial Future." Frowningly he dropped it into the waste basket and reached for his notebook and pencil.

"Income," he wrote and drew a line down the center, "at present twenty-five hundred dollars per year. Prospective increase, ten hundred dollars. Debit, rent of one three-room apartment, household furniture, kitchen ware, *et cetera,* traveling expenses for two, Doris O'Shannon—"

He crossed the last word out and leaned back in his chair, gazing contemplatively into the future—the very near future.

To An Aztec Relic

STRANGE Shape, with pointed jaw and bulging eyes,
Is that a fiendish scowl or lurking grin?
Say, Thing, are you a God of Paradise,
Or effigy of Aztec Mortal Sin?
Relic of culture ages old!
A famous artist made you, none can doubt,
For you are wrought entire of purest gold—
The work unseen in dirt, all gold without.
When in the Monarch's palace you were set
How filled that heathen Artist's heart with pride!
He swore the world would ne'er his work forget,
He called himself immortal—then he died.
For centuries the shifting desert sands
Have piled high above the royal hall
Where you were raised aloft by reverent hands—
A lean coyote howls above the wall

—*Paul Wilson*

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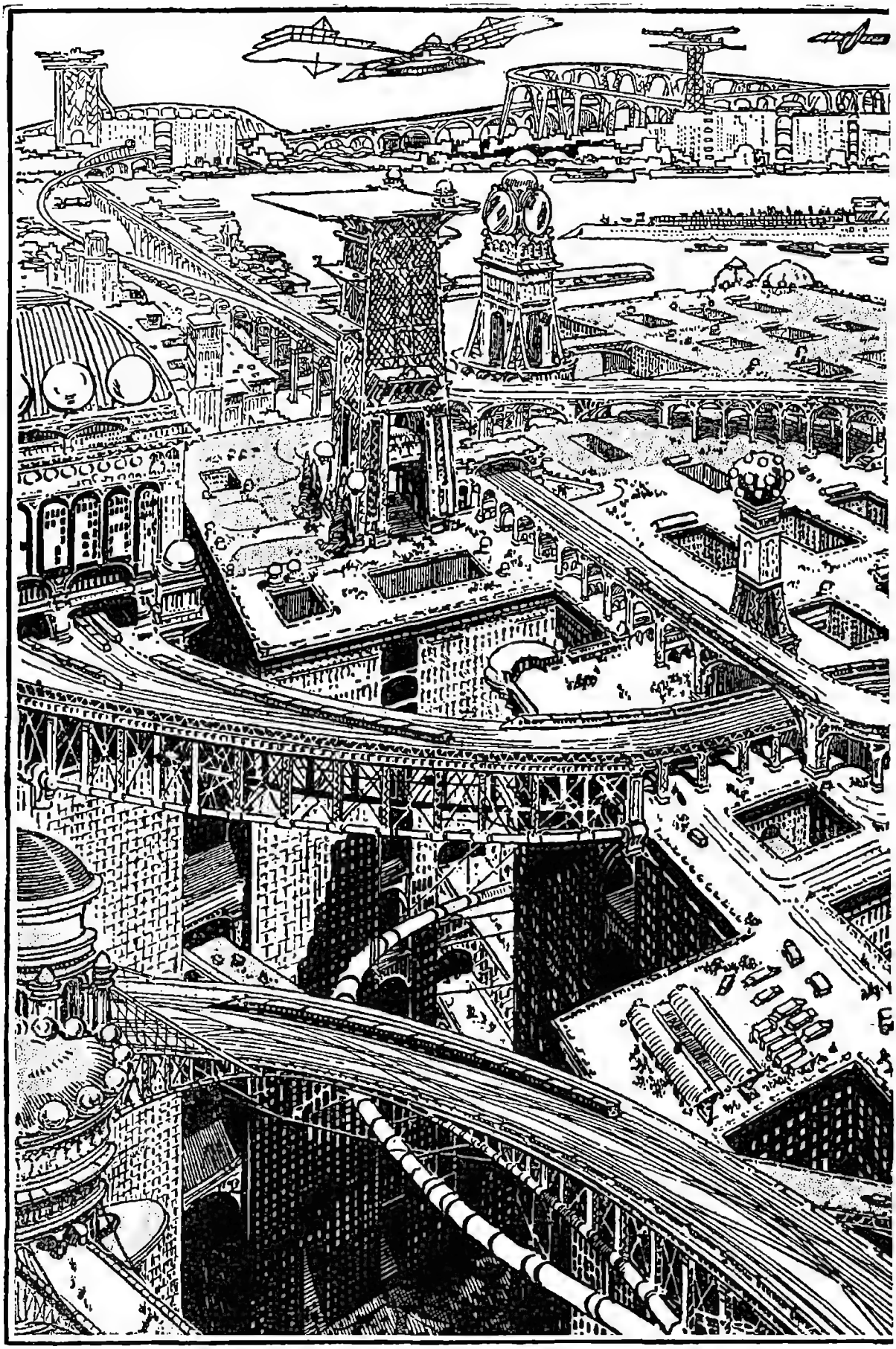

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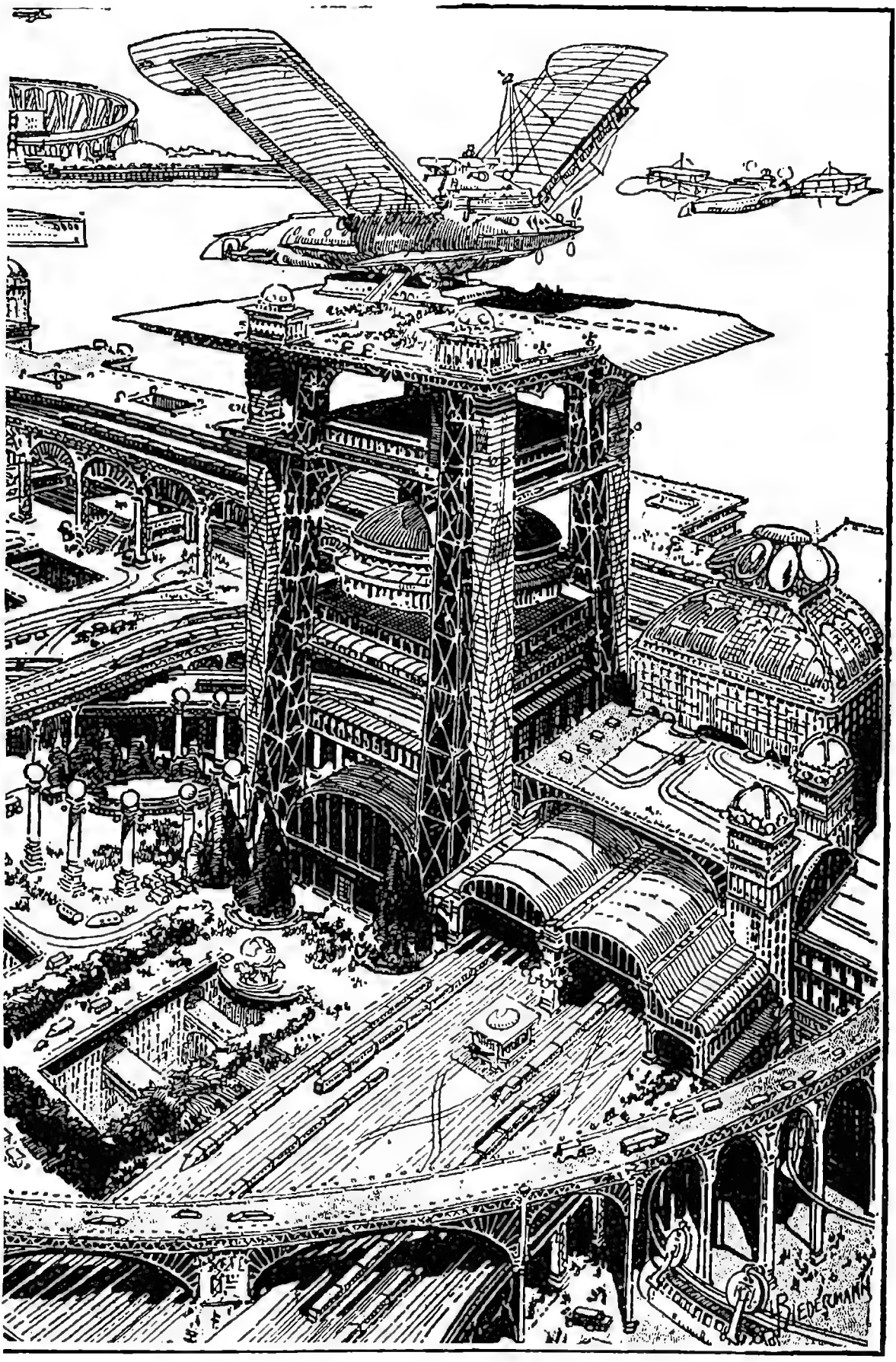

What was foreseen in 1916 as a probably correct picture of the metropolis of the year 2416

Finis

By FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

The last dawn that human eyes would ever see—

"I'M GETTING tired," complained Davis, lounging in the window of the Physics Building, "and sleepy. It's after eleven o'clock. This makes the fourth night I've sat up to see your new star, and it'll be the last. Why, the thing was billed to appear three weeks ago."

"Are *you* tired, Miss Wardour?" asked Eastwood, and the girl glanced up with a quick flush and a negative murmur

Eastwood made the reflection anew that she certainly was painfully shy. She was almost as plain as she was shy, though her hair had an unusual beauty of its own, fine as silk and colored like palest flame.

Probably she had brains; Eastwood had seen her reading some extremely "deep" books, but she seemed to have no amusements, few interests. She worked daily at the Art Students' League, and boarded where he did, and he had thus come to ask her with the Davises to watch for the new star from the laboratory windows on the Heights.

"Do you really think that it's worth while to wait any longer, professor?" inquired Mrs. Davis, concealing a yawn.

Eastwood was somewhat annoyed by the continued failure of the star to show itself, and he hated to be called "professor," being only an assistant professor of physics.

"I don't know," he answered somewhat curtly. "This is the twelfth night that I have waited for it. Of course, it would have been a mathematical miracle if astronomers should have solved such a problem exactly, though they've been figuring on it for a quarter of a century."

The new Physics Building of Columbia University was about twelve stories high. The physics laboratory occupied the ninth and tenth floors, with the astronomical rooms above it, an arrangement which would have been impossible before the invention of the oil vibration cushion, which practically isolated the instrument-rooms from the earth.

Eastwood had arranged a small telescope at the window, and below them spread the illuminated map of Greater New York, sending up a faintly musical roar. All the streets were crowded, as they had been every night since the fifth of the month, when the great new star, or sun, was expected to come into view.

SOME error had been made in the calculations, though, as Eastwood said, astronomers had been figuring on them for twenty-five years.

It was, in fact, nearly forty years since Professor Adolphe Bernier first announced his theory of a limited universe at the International Congress of Sciences in Paris, where it was counted as little more than a masterpiece of imagination.

Professor Bernier did not believe that the universe was infinite. Somewhere, he argued, the universe must have a center, which is the pivot for its revolution.

The moon revolves around the earth, the planetary system revolves about the sun, the solar system revolves about one of the fixed stars, and this whole system in its turn undoubtedly revolves around some more distant point. But this sort of progression must stop somewhere.

Somewhere there must be a central sun, a vast incandescent body which does not move at all. And as a sun is always larger and hotter than its satellites, therefore the body at the center of the universe must be of an immensity and temperature beyond anything known or imagined.

It was objected that this hypothetical

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body should then be large enough to be visible from the earth, and Professor Bernier replied that some day it undoubtedly would be visible. Its light had simply not yet had time to reach the earth.

The passage of light from the nearest of the fixed stars is a matter of three years, and there must be many stars so distant that their rays have not yet reached us. The great central sun must be so inconceivably remote that perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands of years would elapse before its light should burst upon the solar system.

All this was contemptuously classed as "newspaper science," till the extraordinary mathematical revival a little after the middle of the twentieth century afforded the means of verifying it.

Following the new theorems discovered by Professor Burnside, of Princeton, and elaborated by Dr. Taneka, of Tokyo, astronomers succeeded in calculating the arc of the sun's movements through space, and its ratio to the orbit of its satellites. With this as a basis, it was possible to follow the widening circles, the consecutive systems of the heavenly bodies and their rotations.

The theory of Professor Bernier was justified. It was demonstrated that there really was a gigantic mass of incandescent matter, which, whether the central point of the universe or not, appeared to be without motion.

The weight and distance of this new sun were approximately calculated, and, the speed of light being known, it was an easy matter to reckon when its rays would reach the earth.

It was then estimated that the approaching rays would arrive at the earth in twenty-six years, and that was twenty-six years ago. Three weeks had passed since the date when the new heavenly body was expected to become visible, and it had not yet appeared.

Popular interest had risen to a high pitch, stimulated by innumerable newspaper and magazine articles, and the streets were nightly thronged with excited crowds armed with opera-glasses and star maps, while at every corner a telescope man had planted his tripod instrument at a nickel a look.

Similar scenes were taking place in every civilized city on the globe.

It was generally supposed that the new luminary would appear in size about midway between Venus and the moon. Better informed persons expected something like the sun, and a syndicate of capitalists quietly leased large areas on the coast of Greenland in anticipation of a great rise in temperature and a northward movement in population.

Even the business situation was appreciably affected by the public uncertainty and excitement. There was a decline in stocks, and a minor religious sect boldly prophesied the end of the world.

"I've had enough of this," said Davis, looking at his watch again. "Are you ready to go, Grace? By the way, isn't it getting warmer?"

It had been a sharp February day, but the temperature was certainly rising. Water was dripping from the roofs, and from the icicles that fringed the window ledges, as if a warm wave had suddenly arrived.

"What's that light?" suddenly asked Alice Wardour, who was lingering by the open window.

"It must be moonrise," said Eastwood, though the illumination of the horizon was almost like daybreak.

Davis abandoned his intention of leaving, and they watched the east grow pale and flushed till at last a brilliant white disc heaved itself above the horizon.

It resembled the full moon, but as if trebled in luster, and the streets grew almost as light as by day.

"Good heavens, that must be the new star, after all!" said Davis in an awed voice.

"No, it's only the moon. This is the hour and minute for her rising," answered Eastwood, who had grasped the cause of the phenomenon. "But the new sun must have appeared on the other side of the earth. Its light is what makes the moon

so brilliant. It will rise here just as the sun does, no telling how soon. It must be brighter than was expected—and maybe hotter," he added with a vague uneasiness.

"Isn't it getting very warm in here?" said Mrs. Davis, loosening her jacket. "Couldn't you turn off some of the steam heat?"

Eastwood turned it all off, for, in spite of the open window, the room was really growing uncomfortably close. But the warmth appeared to come from without; it was like a warm spring evening, and the icicles were breaking loose from the cornices.

FOR half an hour they leaned from the windows with but desultory conversation, and below them the streets were black with people and whitened with upturned faces. The brilliant moon rose higher, and the mildness of the night sensibly increased.

It was after midnight when Eastwood first noticed the reddish flush tinging the clouds low in the east, and he pointed it out to his companions.

"That must be it at last," he exclaimed, with a thrill of vibrating excitement at what he was going to see, a cosmic event unprecedented in intensity.

The brightness waxed rapidly

"By Jove, see it redden!" Davis ejaculated. "It's getting lighter than day—and hot! Whew!"

The whole eastern sky glowed with a deepening pink that extended half round the horizon. Sparrows chirped from the roofs, and it looked as if the disc of the unknown star might at any moment be expected to lift above the Atlantic, but it delayed long.

The heavens continued to burn with myriad hues, gathering at last to a fiery furnace glow on the sky line.

Mrs. Davis suddenly screamed. An American flag blowing freely from its staff on the roof of the tall building had all at once burst into flame.

Low in the east lay a long streak of intense fire which broadened as they squinted with watering eyes. It was as if the edge of the world had been heated to whiteness.

The brilliant moon faded to a feathery white film in the glare. There was a confused outcry from the observatory overhead, and a crash of something being broken, and as the strange new sunlight fell through the window the onlookers leaped back as if a blast furnace had been opened before them.

The glass cracked and fell inward. Something like the sun, but magnified fifty times in size and hotness, was rising out of the sea. An iron instrument-table by the window began to smoke with an acrid smell of varnish.

"What the devil is this, Eastwood?" shouted Davis accusingly.

From the streets rose a sudden, enormous wail of fright and pain, the outcry of a million throats at once, and the roar of a stampede followed. The pavements were choked with struggling, panic-stricken people in the fierce glare, and above the din arose the clanging rush of fire-engines and trucks.

Smoke began to rise from several points below Central Park, and two or three church chimes pealed crazily.

The observers from overhead came running down the stairs with a thunderous trampling, for the elevator man had deserted his post.

"Here, we've got to get out of this," shouted Davis, seizing his wife by the arm and hustling her toward the door. "This place'll be on fire directly."

"Hold on. You can't go down into that crush on the street," Eastwood cried, trying to prevent him.

But Davis broke away and raced down the stairs, half carrying his terrified wife. Eastwood got his back against the door in time to prevent Alice from following them.

"There's nothing in this building that will burn, Miss Wardour," he said as calmly as he could. "We had better stay here for the present. It would be sure death to get involved in that stampede below. Just listen to it."

The crowds on the street seemed to sway to and fro in contending waves, and the cries, curses, and screams came up in a savage chorus.

The heat was already almost blistering to the skin, though they carefully avoided the direct rays, and instruments of glass in the laboratory cracked loudly one by one.

A vast cloud of dark smoke began to rise from the harbor, where the shipping must have caught fire, and something exploded with a terrific report. A few minutes later half a dozen fires broke out in the lower part of the city, rolling up volumes of smoke that faded to a thin mist in the dazzling light.

The great new sun was now fully above the horizon, and the whole east seemed ablaze. The stampede in the streets had quieted all at once, for the survivors had taken refuge in the nearest houses, and the pavements were black with motionless forms of men and women.

"I'll do whatever you say," said Alice, who was deadly pale, but remarkably collected. Even at that moment Eastwood was struck by the splendor of her etherially brilliant hair that burned like pale flame above her pallid face. "But we can't stay here, can we?"

"No," replied Eastwood, trying to collect his faculties in the face of this catastrophic revolution of nature. "We'd better go to the basement, I think."

In the basement were deep vaults used for the storage of delicate instruments, and these would afford shelter for a time at least. It occurred to him as he spoke that perhaps temporary safety was the best that any living thing on earth could hope for.

But he led the way down the well staircase. They had gone down six or seven flights when a gloom seemed to grow upon the air, with a welcome relief.

It seemed almost cool, and the sky had clouded heavily, with the appearance of polished and heated silver.

A deep but distant roaring arose and grew from the southeast, and they stopped on the second landing to look from the window.

A VAST black mass seemed to fill the space between sea and sky, and it was sweeping toward the city, probably from the harbor, Eastwood thought, at a speed that made it visibly grow as they watched it.

"A cyclone—and a waterspout!" muttered Eastwood, appalled.

He might have foreseen it from the sudden, excessive evaporation and the heating of the air. The gigantic black pillar drove toward them swaying and reeling, and a gale came with it, and a wall of impenetrable mist behind.

As Eastwood watched its progress he saw its cloudy bulk illumined momentarily by a dozen lightning-like flashes, and a moment later, above its roar, came the tremendous detonations of heavy cannon.

The forts and the warships were firing shells to break the waterspout, but the shots seemed to produce no effect. It was

the city's last and useless attempt at resistance. A moment later forts and ships alike must have been engulfed.

"Hurry! This building will collapse!" Eastwood shouted.

They rushed down another flight, and heard the crash with which the monster broke over the city. A deluge of water, like the emptying of a reservoir, thundered upon the street, and the water was steaming hot as it fell.

There was a rending crash of falling walls, and in another instant the Physics Building seemed to be twisted around by a powerful hand. The walls blew out, and the whole structure sank in a chaotic mass.

But the tough steel frame was practically unwreckable, and, in fact, the upper portion was simply bent down upon the lower stories, peeling off most of the shell of masonry and stucco.

Eastwood was stunned as he was hurled to the floor, but when he came to himself he was still upon the landing, which was tilted at an alarming angle. A tangled mass of steel rods and beams hung a yard over his head, and a huge steel girder had plunged down perpendicularly from above, smashing everything in its way.

Wreckage choked the well of the staircase, a mass of plaster, bricks, and shattered furniture surrounded him, and he could look out in almost every direction through the rent iron skeleton.

A yard away Alice was sitting up, mechanically wiping the mud and water from her face, and apparently uninjured. Tepid water was pouring through the interstices of the wreck in torrents, though it did not appear to be raining.

A steady, powerful gale had followed the whirlwind, and it brought a little coolness with it. Eastwood inquired perfunctorily of Alice if she were hurt, without being able to feel any degree of interest in the matter. His faculty of sympathy seemed paralyzed.

"I don't know. I thought—I thought that we were all dead!" the girl murmured in a sort of daze. "What was it? Is it all over?"

"I think it's only beginning," Eastwood answered dully.

The gale had brought up more cloud, and the skies were thickly overcast, but shining white-hot. Presently the rain came down in almost scalding floods, and as it fell upon the hissing streets it steamed again into the air.

In three minutes all the world was choked with hot vapor, and from the roar and splash the streets seemed to be running rivers.

The downpour seemed too violent to endure, and after an hour it did cease, while the city reeked with mist. Through the whirling fog Eastwood caught glimpses of ruined buildings, vast heaps of débris, all the wreckage of the greatest city of the twentieth century.

Then the torrents fell again like a cataract, as if the waters of the earth were shuttlecocking between sea and heaven. With a jarring tremor of the ground a landslide went down into the Hudson.

The atmosphere was like a vapor bath, choking and sickening. The physical agony of respiration aroused Alice from a sort of stupor, and she cried out pitifully that she would die.

The strong wind drove the hot spray and steam through the shattered building till it seemed impossible that human lungs could extract life from the semi-liquid that had replaced the air, but the two lived.

After hours of this parboiling the rain slackened, and, as the clouds parted, Eastwood caught a glimpse of a familiar form half way up the heavens. It was the sun, the old sun, looking small and watery.

But the intense heat and brightness told that the enormous body still blazed behind the clouds. The rain seemed to have ceased definitely, and the hard, shining whiteness of the sky grew rapidly hotter.

The heat of the air increased to an oven-like degree; the mists were dissipated, the clouds licked up, and the earth seemed to dry itself almost immediately. The heat from the two suns beat down simultaneously till it became a monstrous terror, unendurable.

An odor of smoke began to permeate the air; there was a dazzling shimmer over the streets, and great clouds of mist arose from the bay, but these appeared to evaporate before they could darken the sky.

The piled wreck of the building sheltered the two refugees from the direct rays of the new sun, now almost overhead, but not from the penetrating heat of the air. But the body will endure almost anything, short of tearing asunder, for a time at least; it is the finer mechanism of the nerves that suffers most.

ALICE lay face down among the bricks, gasping and moaning. The blood hammered in Eastwood's brain, and the strangest mirages flickered before his eyes. Alternately he lapsed into heavy stupors, and awoke to the agony of the day. In his lucid moments he reflected that this could not last long, and tried to remember what degree of heat would cause death.

Within an hour after the drenching rains he was feverishly thirsty, and the skin felt as if peeling from his whole body.

This fever and horror lasted until he forgot that he had ever known another state; but at last the west reddened, and the flaming sun went down. It left the familiar planet high in the heavens, and there was no darkness until the usual hour, though there was a slight lowering of the temperature.

But when night did come it brought life-giving coolness, and though the heat was still intense it seemed temperate by comparison. More than all, the kindly darkness seemed to set a limit to the cataclysmic disorders of the day.

"Ouf! This is heavenly!" said Eastwood, drawing long breaths and feeling mind and body revived in the gloom.

"It won't last long," replied Alice, and her voice sounded extraordinarily calm through the darkness. "The heat will come again when the new sun rises in a few hours."

"We might find some better place in the meanwhile—a deep cellar; or we might get into the Subway," Eastwood suggested.

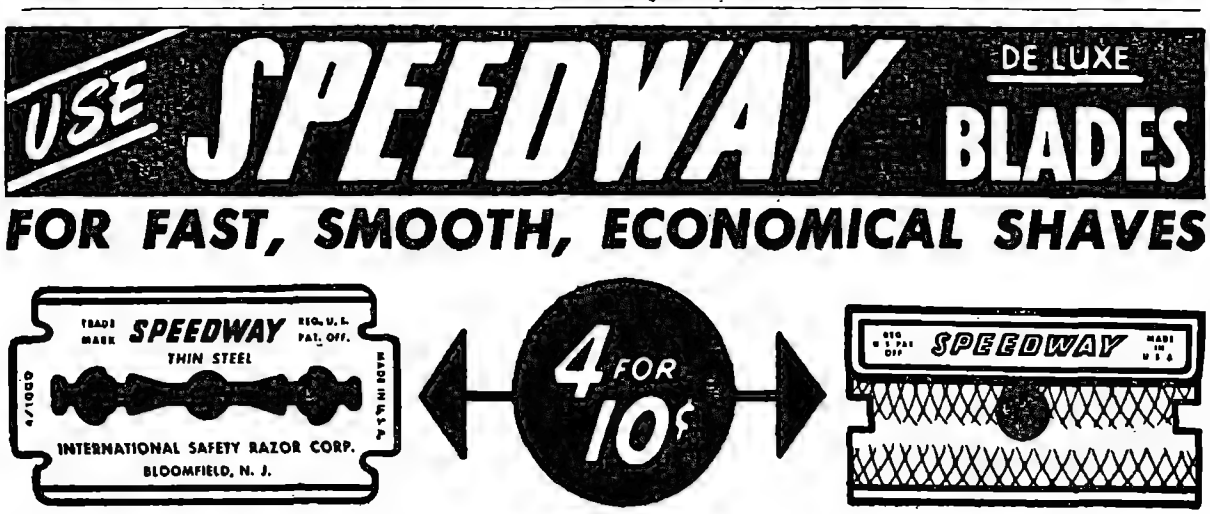
"It would be no use. Don't you understand? I have been thinking it all out. After this, the new sun will always shine, and we could not endure it even another day. The wave of heat is passing round the world as it revolves, and in a few hours the whole earth will be a burnt-up ball. Very likely we are the only people left alive in New York, or perhaps in America."

She seemed to have taken the intellectual initiative, and spoke with an assumption of authority that amazed him.

"But there must be others," said Eastwood, after thinking for a moment. "Other people have found sheltered places, or miners, or men underground."

"They would have been drowned by the rain. At any rate, there will be none left alive by tomorrow night.

"Think of it," she went on dreamily. "For a thousand years this wave of fire



has been rushing toward us, while life has been going on so happily in the world, so unconscious that the world was doomed all the time. And now this is the end of life."

"I don't know," Eastwood said slowly. "It may be the end of human life, but there must be some forms that will survive—some micro-organisms perhaps capable of resisting high temperatures, if nothing higher. The seed of life will be left at any rate, and that is everything. Evolution will begin over again, producing new types to suit the changed conditions. I only wish I could see what creatures will be here in a few thousand years.

"But I can't realize it at all—this thing!" he cried passionately, after a pause. "Is it real? Or have we all gone mad? It seems too much like a bad dream."

The rain crashed down again as he spoke, and the earth steamed, though not with the dense reek of the day. For hours the waters roared and splashed against the earth in hot billows till the streets were foaming yellow rivers, dammed by the wreck of fallen buildings.

There was a continual rumble as earth and rock slid into the East River, and at last the Brooklyn Bridge collapsed with a thunderous crash and splash that made all Manhattan vibrate. A gigantic billow like a tidal wave swept up the river from its fall.

The downpour slackened and ceased soon after the moon began to shed an obscured but brilliant light through the clouds.

Presently the east commenced to grow luminous, and this time there could be no doubt as to what was coming.

Alice crept closer to the man as the gray light rose upon the watery air.

"Kiss me!" she whispered suddenly, throwing her arms around his neck. He could feel her trembling. "Say you love me; hold me in your arms. I want you to love me—now—now. There is only an hour."

"Don't be afraid. Try to face it bravely," stammered Eastwood.

"I don't fear it—not death. But I have never lived. I have never had love. I have never felt or known anything. I have always been timid and wretched and afraid—afraid to speak—and I've almost wished for suffering and misery or anything rather than to be stupid and dumb and dead, as I've always been.

"I've never dared to tell anyone what I was, what I wanted. I've been afraid all my life, but I'm not afraid now. I have never lived; I have never been happy; and now we must die together!"

It seemed to Eastwood the cry of the perishing world. He held her in his arms and kissed her wet, tremulous face that was strained to his.

In that terrible desolation his heart turned toward her, and a strange passion intoxicated him as his lips met hers, an intoxication and passion more poignant for the certainty of coming death.

"You must love me—you must!" whispered Alice. "Let us live, a little, at the very last!"

THE twilight was gone before he knew it. The sky was blue already, with crimson flakes mounting to the zenith, and the heat was growing once more intense.

"This is the end, Alice," said Eastwood, and his voice trembled.

She looked at him, her eyes shining with an unearthly softness and brilliancy, and turned her face to the east.

There, in crimson and orange, flamed the last dawn that human eyes would ever see.

The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to The Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, 280 Broadway, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

Analyzing F. F. M.

There is something about a science fiction fan that makes him want to write letters to magazine editors. What it is I don't know, but I do know I must make further comments to you about F.F.M.

I read all the letters in the Readers' Viewpoint and try to note the worthwhile suggestions. Here are some that seem to stand out. Famous Fantasy, suggested by C. Hidley, would make an excellent and (to me) an improved name. The book length serials should by all means be printed *in full.* A department to rate the stories is most welcome. How about a question and answer department concerning authors and their works? Many of them are still writing and it would be worthwhile to know about their recent works. For instance, I am curious to know if A. Merritt has written anything since "Creep Shadow."

A book announcement policy would be a fine thing, too. More serials per issue seems in demand. And fewer installments of increased length is a popular suggestion. The suggestions for the stories to be printed are perfect. It seems unusual how close the readers agree on the stories they want.

For my part, I can endorse practically all the suggested stories so far. A. Merritt seems to be the most in demand, with Farley, Hall, England, Serviss, Smith, Cummings, etc., following after. About Cummings, the readers don't seem to all hold the same opinion. There can be no denying Ray Cummings has written some very commonplace stories, but also the fantasy fans must admit that he has several classics of the first order.

"The Girl in the Golden Atom" series (by the way please hurry that sequel) is one of the most famous. And his "Man Who Mastered Time" is probably the greatest of all the time traveling adventures. For my part I hope you can publish a lot of Ray Cummings stories.

About reprints versus new stories. Stick to the old classics for the most part. An occasional new story is all right, but there are too many fans clamoring for the old stories to spare the room.

Now about this business of taking stories from other magazines other than the Munsey publications. It is all right but it certainly seems best to use all the old ARGOSY classics first as they are the ones most in demand. Munsey's is certainly fortunate to have such a rich store of the old classics.

Upwards of 75 stories have already been asked for by your readers. Most of these are of the book length type. At the present rate of two serials, counting an average of five installments to each, you will be able to print a total of about five full length stories per year. This means 15 years to print the stories now in demand!

With all this off my chest, you have my very best regards.

CHARLES W. WOLFE.

417 Tenth St.,
LAS VEGAS, N. M.

Paul and Science Fiction

Your magazine is a veritable "time machine" to the past, especially with Paul illustrating some of the stories. Please use him as much as possible. His drawings, like the stories, recall to one a great past of science fiction; a past, that until the publication of your magazine, was growing further and further from the present. Paul is practically a part of science fiction and so I believe it fitting that he, above all others, should be the one to illustrate the great classics that you are now publishing.

Virgil Finlay is a perfect illustrator for the pure fantastic stories.

Tread carefully when publishing other than reprint stories. There are over a dozen magazines in the fantasy field now. So far, your new stories have been well chosen, however.

I am glad "Darkness and Dawn" will start soon as such authors as England are rare in science fiction. Serviss, Smith and Hall are other men whose stories are always well written and whose work is greatly appreciated.

With such an abundance of really worthwhile material available it should be possible to publish the magazine at least twice a month. I am sure that this would meet with the overwhelming approval of all the readers especially as the serials are the feature stories and a month is a long wait between installments. Would this be possible?*

Thank you for the only enjoyment I've gotten from science fiction in many years.

CARL MAINFORT.

2607 Valley Drive,
ALEXANDRIA, VA.

**We may be able to double the output of complete long stories, later*—EDITOR.

Six Months Too Long

I am writing you to offer a few more suggestions as to how the magazine should be run!

First I must disagree with Mr. Musil who asks in the Readers' Viewpoint for an unfixed method of selection. Most people have had access to fantastic fiction for the past five or ten years. I am strongly against printing anything that has appeared since 1934 or later. I am sure that there are enough great stories from 1900 to 1930 or so to keep the magazine well supplied for a long time.

"Son of the Stars," while an excellent story, has no place in F. F M. until the rich wealth of the past thirty-five years has been completely drained for the magazine.

Why not increase the size of F. F. M. about twice? Six months is too long a time to wait for the longer novels.

RICHARD G. CLARK.

706 West Maple,
CENTERVILLE, IOWA.

Installments Too Long

I have thoroughly enjoyed every issue of F. F. M. and I look forward eagerly to forthcoming ones. The variety of stories is excellent.

If you must serialize, may I suggest that you limit the installments to not more than 3 or 4? This would save us readers the prolonged agony of waiting that threatens to snap our nerves, as in the case of "The Conquest of the Moon Pool."

Are you limited to stories with Frank A. Munsey copyright? I am no authority on fantastics but I remember reading some of the most thrilling stories of this kind in the Weird Tales Magazine. Take the Robert E. Howard, Conan, the Barbarian, series. Also I remember several novels of interplanetary adventure by Jack Williamson in the old Amazing Stories Magazine that could only be described as out and out humdingers! A pity that I cannot recall their titles.

And speaking of the granddaddy of fantastics, I would like to see the stories that could beat the first three Martian novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs: "A Princess of Mars," "Gods of Mars," and "Warlord of Mars." While perhaps they lack the literary smoothness of Merritt's tales (Ship of Ishtar, et al), they have the advantage of packing more action to the column inch than anything I have ever read! That reminds me, how about including a real literary fantastic now and then, such as, any of Lovecraft's stories?*

SALVADOR E. ARGUILLA.

442 M H del Pilar,
ERMITA, MANILLA, PHILIPPINES.

* *This is a possibility.*—EDITOR.

A Point Cleared Up

I am glad that you liked my letter and thought it was good enough to print. I suppose it will appear in the April issue.

Although I favored the old covers, I like the new cover on the March issue. It's reminiscent of the early ARGOSY covers.

When I approved of new stories in F. F. M. I meant that stories of this type which would otherwise be scheduled for ARGOSY and which would irritate hundreds of ARGOSY anti-scientifantasticfiction readers can now appear in the new magazine. I see that ARGOSY intends to continue printing this type of story. I want this point in my other letter made clear, hence this explanation.

As you may have noted in my other letter, I don't think you should use up valuable space in F. F. M. for Edgar Rice Burroughs. Almost all of his stories are easily available, even in book form. So, I emphatically disagree with Jimmy Taurasi on this point.

Warning! In the March issue, Charles Hidley suggests "Please stick to the weird tale and not the science-fiction." Don't make a rule of his suggestion or you will neglect some splendid stories.

I hope that F. F. M. becomes the most popular magazine on the market!

JOHN WASSO, JR.

119 Jackson Ave.,
PEN ARGYL, PA.

Few Departments, Please

I am, comparatively, a newcomer to the ranks of the Fantasy Fans, having been reading everything in this field I could get my hands on for only the past fifteen years. So it is with great delight that I find myself, through your magazine, in possession of some of the early classics.

You say that you want more letters from readers, so here are my opinions.

First—the make-up of the magazine. I like its size, paper, type and interior illustrations. As to the cover: reduce, slightly, the size of the title; give us larger illustrations, but do not allow them to become garish. (Your artwork has showed good taste, up to now. We rely on your judgment to have it continue so.) Continue the Editor's Page, Readers' Viewpoint and Popularity Poll, but do not, as some have suggested, overburden the magazine with departments—quiz, answer page, author's life, etc. We buy the magazine for the stories.

Thanks for the Moon Pool stories and the "Blind Spot." You are really "pouring everything on" at once.

As for the new stories, I liked "Bomb from Beranga." It had that old-time fantasy touch. The "Son of the Stars," however, does not pre-

tend to be fantasy, and it is not even plausible.

For your "new" stories, may I suggest authors C. L. Moore, C. A. Smith, Jack Williamson, and if possible, E. E. Smith and A. Merritt?

May you continue to grow!

L. M. JENSEN.

Box 35,
COWLEY, WYOMING.

Fantastic Books Wanted

Any information as to where I may buy the collected works of the following authors will be deeply appreciated.

Nictzin Dyalhis, Warner H. Munn, C. L. Moore, R. C. Ashby, Colin De la Mare, Guy Endore, Charles Fort, M. R. James, Alex Laing, A. Merritt, Seabury Quinn, Cynthia Asquith, H. B. Drake, H. H. Ewers, Everett T. Harre, J. D. Kerruish, Arthur Machen, D. L. Sayers.

Please write the Letter Editor, quoting prices.

VAUGHAN HEINER.

Collector's Handbook

Under separate cover I am sending for your desk a copy of the 1939 Yearbook of Science, Weird and Fantasy Fiction.

The first section lists these stories in alphabetical order, together with magazine and date of appearance, while the second section gives the complete contents of each issue of each magazine, listing not only the story title, but also its author, illustrator, and length and type, or kind, of story. Also listed is other information on the magazines: covers, cover artists, editor, price, number of pages, dates of appearance, etc.

I should be grateful could this letter be published in the reader's section. The cost is twenty cents per copy, postpaid. I will be glad to send a descriptive circular to any one requesting the same.

BOB TUCKER.

P. O. Box 260,
BLOOMINGTON, ILL.

Merritt Books Wanted

I would like to purchase for a friend as complete a set of A. Merritt's books as it is possible to obtain. I refer specifically to the following: "The Ship of Ishtar," "Dwellers in the Mirage," "Burn, Witch, Burn," "The Moon Pool," "The Face in the Abyss," etc.

If any readers have these books and are willing to sell them, will they write to The Letter Editor, and say for how much they will let each item be sold?

ARTHUR S. BIER.

NEW YORK CITY.

An Action-Fantasy Fan

For years I have been buying every so-called science-fiction magazine as soon as it struck the newsstands, hoping against hope that one day the miracle would happen. What miracle, you say? Why, the miracle of a magazine that would print stories of the same type and quality as ARGOSY'S great action-fantasies.

You will notice that I said "action-fantasies." I write that phrase after due consideration as embodying my idea of just what makes the best of the ARGOSY stories THE best.

I have no fault to find with science. I think our world is much the better because of it. But human values come first! The play's the thing. Mechanisms have their place as servants of man but after all, they are cold and static. We can never love them or sympathize with them. They belong in the background.

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES is the answer to the prayer of those who, like myself, are sick and tired of stories in which the accent is placed upon static rather than upon dynamic factors, in which the all-important element of conflict and adventure is lost somewhere in a jungle of scientific jargon.

There is not much I can say against your magazine except that it should be issued twice a month instead of only once, or that I would like to see more pages to it, even if you had to raise the price of the magazine to 20c in order to do it.

You are doing an excellent editorial job and I have no complaints to make on that score. I only wish to add my plea to that of many other correspondents when they write in to beg you "please do not under any circumstances cut a story down." Print everything in full. Otherwise you are not being fair to your readers, and they will resent the dilution. Fantasy fans have long memories.

F. F. M.'s readers, when making requests for future publications, neglect a writer who, in my opinion is especially worthy, namely Otis Adelbert Kline. I believe that he is on a par, almost, with Merritt, Burroughs and Farley. How about a reprint of "Maza of the Moon," and "The Planet of Peril"? Yes, and all the other Kline stories when you get the space, probably circa 1945.

W. STOCKEBRAND.

1706 N. 57th St.,
W. PHILA., PA.

A Bit of Esperanto

Redaktoro,
FAMAJ FANTAZIAJ MISTEROJ:

Saluton!—The actual greeting in that tongue of "tomoro," Esperanto, which, quoting your reprint of "The Planet Juggler," in March, was "the universalanguage (coalescence mine) used by all the intelligent classes of the

Earth." I was extremely interested to note this reference to auxiliary language Esperanto, which I have studyd. I am not here to propagandize for Esp., however; the fact just is that ever since reading his "Polaristorys" I have been anxious to read any and all "Giesyarns"—& among those U have access to, I understand, is a short-short titled "In 2112," together with Esperanto version "En Du-Mil Cent Dek-Du." How are chances for an early reprinting? Dankon!

(Miss) Morojo.

Box 6475, Metro Sta.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

March Issue Perfect

Just a few lines this time to let you know that the March issue is a corker. You have the best fantasy mag on the stands now, barring none.

I take back what I said about leaving the cover as it was; the new one is great, it will be if it is done by good artists. You have the two best in the field in Finlay and Paul.

Don't accept any other artists.

The long awaited classic "The Blind Spot," of the great minds of Flint and Hall, was the best story of the issue. "The Planet Juggler" is the type of story I like best. That is, the interplanetary type. The rest of the mag was swell. A 100 per cent issue—perfect.

Please enlarge The Readers' Viewpoint, it is too small now. I like to read letters.

I can't tell you how much pleasure we are obtaining from this treasure book.

You are a messiah to us friends of fantasy. See you next month.

Yours in Fantasy,

Francis J. Moroff.

1210 Simpson St.,
Bronx, N. Y.

Knows Her Classics

This is a letter from an admirer of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. I wish to commend whoever had the happy idea of reprinting the old favorites in a magazine all their own! I thought the first issue a fine one, so I will not say that succeeding issues were better than the last, but that each one is equal to the other, which is praise enough, I think.

I have read the fourth part of Merritt's "Conquest of the Moon Pool" (by the way, you can't go wrong on Merritt. All of his stories will bear re-telling—"The People of the Pit," for instance). I never read "The Conquest" before, and am very interested in it.

"The Sky Woman" and "The Man Who Saved the Earth" were not new to me, but I enjoyed reading them again. Don't forget "The Blind Spot" has a sequel.

Years ago the old ALL-STORY published what I consider the best ghost story I ever read (and I've read a lot). I no longer have the copy and would like to see it reprinted—the title: "Wild Wullie the Waster" and the author, Tod Robbins. At that time unusual tales were labeled "Different Stories" by the editors, and there were many of them. There were two by Philip Fisher, Jr., that were wonderful.

Homer Eon Flint could be counted on for a fine story. I wonder if readers remember that his passing was like one of his own stories. I mean he went, literally, "into the infinite"—drove his car out onto some desert, I believe, and was not seen or heard from again. Vanished, perhaps, into a "Blind Spot"!

I hope I see some of the stories I have mentioned in future issues of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, and, in the meantime, just go on keeping it the superlative magazine that it is!

Myrtle M. Ballinger.

Lorane, Pa.

"The Blind Spot" Best

I was somewhat disappointed by the cover illustration on the March issue of F. F. M. I don't object to having a weird scene but the amount of printing hardly left room for a suitable picture (although "The Blind Spot" deserves such a build-up I'll have to admit).

I rated the stories as follows: 1. The Blind Spot; 2. Conquest of the Moon Pool; 3. The Planet Juggler; 4. Bomb from Beranga; 5. A Place of Monsters; 6. The Belated Tears of Louis Marcel.

Especially good are Paul's drawings for "The Planet Juggler." Don't ever lose him.

Philip Bronson.

224 W. 6th St.,
Hastings, Minn.

Liked "Planet Juggler"

I am writing to give you my thanks for your swell magazine. Since I am not an old fan I am glad to see the kind of stories that appeared in the so-called "good old days." From what I have read so far, the stories then were quite a bit better than the ones of today.

"The Conquest of the Moon Pool," is one of the best stories I have ever read. All the other stories in the March issue were good, especially, "The Planet Juggler." I have not read the great story "The Blind Spot," but it promises to be splendid.

Eric Rolaff.

Moon Valley Farm,
Flat, Mo.

More Long Stories Wanted

At the close of 1939 a miracle happened. F. F. M. came into existence and commenced publishing not just strange stories but the real McCoy. Each and every story is really and

truly a masterpiece in its own right. Every issue is just like a dream to me. I have nothing but my heartiest congratulations to the publishers of this magazine. I am a fantasy fan and collector—have been for ten years—and if this magazine keeps on the way it has well, words fail me.

I can only think of two requests, to make this wonderful dream come true.

1. Run this magazine weekly or at least twice a month, with at least three serials.

2. Use only old stories.

Keep on with this type of stories and your magazine will always be famous.

RALPH BROWN.

WOODBINE, IOWA

"The Blind Spot" Tops

I have just finished the March issue of your magazine, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. The story, "The Blind Spot" is supreme, one of my favorites. I had read it a few years ago and knew I liked it, but have forgotten the details of the story, so it's all new, and I'll say again, it's tops in stories. Next best is "The Planet Juggler." Please print more stories on this order. It was wonderful.

"Bomb from Beranga" was quite good. Then "Conquest of the Moon Pool." I did not care for the stories. "The Belated Tears," of Louis Marcel or "The Place of Monsters." I like your idea of telling which stories the readers liked the best. My choice is as follows: "The Girl in the Golden Atom," "The Blind Spot," "The Radio Man," "The Planet Juggler," "The Moon Pool," "The Moon Metal," "The Radiant Enemies," "The World in the Balance," "Who Is Charles Avison?", "On the Brink of 2000," "The Man Who Saved the Earth," "Son of the Stars," "The Plunge of the Knupfen."

(MRS.) KATHERINE MARCUSSON.

32 E. Congress St.,
DETROIT, MICH.

Likes Austin Hall

Of course, F. F. M. has more than excelled the idealistic expectations of its many readers. Here is a brief commentary on the last two issues.

The cover, though disappointing in size, was very good and Finlay at his best.

"The Blind Spot" starts off with an air of mystery that just leaves an ache in me for that next issue to come along. Concerning this; as much as the market is now flooded with fantamags, and as much as I hate serials, I do wish F. F. M. might go semi-monthly. Twice a month would lessen that long, too long, wait of thirty days, and many serial dodgers will be converted. And we all realize that these great stories could be nothing else but serials because of length. I believe Austin Hall to be the most gifted author you have so far presented, with "Almost Immortal," "The Man Who Saved the Earth" and half of "The Blind Spot" to his illustrious credit. Are those Paul drawings some of his old work? If not, his work for you is much better than it is in any other publication now.

One new tale a month is a very good idea, as the two so far have proved. Give artist credit line.

CHARLES HILDEY.

2541 Aqueduct Ave.,
NEW YORK CITY.

Merritt Still Best

I am very much pleased with No. 6 (Mar.) issue of F. F. M. Considering Munsey publications only, there is an enormous store-house of fantasy fiction available for F. F. M. Some of it is outstanding; much of it is very good; some is, without doubt, poor. So far, fully half of the stories published belong in the top group; very few in the last. Moreover, every issue has been better than the preceding, and that statement applies to the current number.

"The Conquest of the Moon Pool" still rates highest with me, mainly because of its beauty. "The Blind Spot" is also very good.

I enjoyed "The Planet Juggler," partly because of the utterly naïve astronomical concepts. Imagine having to *dodge* a *constellation*, the component stars of which, however they may appear, are many light years apart. Or "approaching" the milky way—actually, the farther you traveled toward any point in the milky way, the dimmer, less thickly strewn it would become in front of you, and the more brilliant it would become behind you. The story had a breath-taking sweep, however, which was magnificent.

"Bomb from Beranga" was a good story, well written by an author who has written some very fine Sc. Fiction in other mags. The plot is not particularly new, but it was well handled.

"A Place of Monsters" also is splendidly written—beats anything of its type I have read in many years.

"The Belated Tears" of Louis Marcel is a type of story I have seldom read. Very well done. There is little to choose between the last three stories named.

I am not sure I like the change in cover, but certainly, I like the fine bit of work done on it by Finlay. His inside illustrations are still tops, although Paul's work for "The Planet Juggler." is excellent

D. B. THOMPSON.

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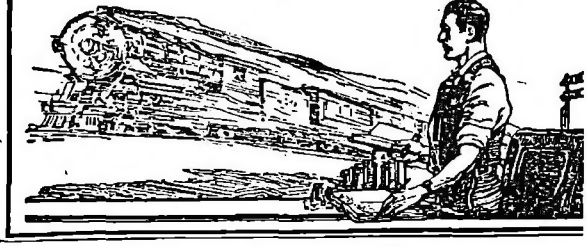

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